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**J. BRIDGET HOAD      H906135X**

**TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF PROCRASTINATING  
BEHAVIOURS IN A KEY STAGE 1 CLASSROOM.**

**DOCTOR OF EDUCATION (Ed D)**

**29th September 2000.**

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**DECLARATION:**

No part of this material has previously been submitted for a degree or other qualification of this or any other university or institution.

## **ABSTRACT.**

This study sets out to understand repeated procrastinating behaviours which may become detrimental to effective teaching, learning and assessment. The five case studies were conducted in a local authority primary school over a period of two years when the children were in Key Stage 1, aged five, six and seven years.

The focus of this study was the possible detrimental effects of procrastinating behaviours in curriculum learning, through assigned tasks. Behaviours were observed and interviews conducted to reach an understanding of the tasks from the child's perspective. The teacher's perspective of the behaviours within the wide context of the assigned task was interrogated through social constructivist theories of learning. The communicative process, by which co-participants in a task come to understand that task, was examined in light of the observed procrastinating behaviours. Within this process the influence of pupil learning identities, the use of power and questioning were particularly salient.

The case studies suggest, in keeping with the author's view, that procrastinating behaviours do have a detrimental effect on curriculum teaching, learning and assessment. It would appear that in the course of procrastinating, task objectives may be: ongoingly altered by the learners to confirm existing skills and knowledge, rejected by the learner in favour of alternative interests or progressively differentiated by the teacher in order to engage the learner, narrowing the opportunities for shared control of learning. It would seem that these behaviours have much to do with the active interpretation of tasks against the socio-cultural background of what passes as classroom knowledge and becomes classroom culture. It is likely that procrastinating behaviours may be reduced in conditions that allow learning to be 'scaffolded' in the social constructivist sense, that value discourse as a means of learning from each other and that share power and control of learning.

The study proposes strategies which practitioners might find useful in identifying and reducing the incidence of procrastinating behaviours. These strategies are all concerned with the promotion of discourse in teaching, learning and assessment. They relate to task organisation and management, the construction of classroom culture and the learner's role in approaching tasks. Through each of the strategies, the community in which the learners find themselves, has a role to play. This proposes a shift from individualism and differentiation to teaching with the goal of full participation.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

I believe pupils in the evaluative context of the classroom, interpret their role as learners in relation to that context. From their structural position of relative powerlessness, they attend to elements of assigned tasks which hold interest for them, motivating them to engage in active intellectual and social learning. Their interests, knowledge and skills have a history and biography which unfold and develop in that learning situation. If those interests are marginalised in normative prescriptions and the school structure, pupils refocus on interests which are meaningful to them, sustaining their self-concept and the need to feel included, valued and in control. This may or may not be task related. The situation is redefined by the pupils in a period which may be characterised by apparent *procrastinating behaviours*.

Whilst I recognise that all learners may procrastinate from time to time, and this may be socially, politically or intellectually astute, it is my opinion that learning is impeded by repeated procrastinating behaviours, which may become habitual. *In the context of this study, procrastinating behaviours are defined as those observable behaviours which mark an apparent delay before a child **engages** in an assigned task, **demonstrating** a commitment to that task and **participating** accordingly.*

I take the assigned task as my unit of analysis. The assigned task is the unit through which a teacher interprets the curriculum on behalf of the learner, in order to meet prescribed learning objectives. Those objectives may be both behavioural and academic. I confine myself to assigned tasks, because in these both teacher and pupil aim to share a common focus and behaviours may be judged in relation to that focus. In this study I take the teacher's perspective of tasks, judging learning in relation to the teacher's objective, shared with the learner. Assigned tasks are communicated to the learner within the socially constructed parameters in which the learning takes place. In using the task, I set the parameters of the communicative processes with which I am concerned. I adopt Mercer's (1995) definition of the communicative processes, 'The processes in which one person helps

another to develop knowledge and understanding' (p.1). In order to *participate* in a task, the learner necessarily demonstrates, verbally or non-verbally, a contribution to that task. The teacher may use what is demonstrated to refine or develop strategies which will empower the learner in achieving new skills and knowledge. *Demonstration* of the necessary commitment may be by verbal, non-verbal or written record. Throughout this study the terms child, learner and pupil are used interchangeably. Tasks are referred to by sequential number as they occur in the data analysis, hence (1) is the first task described.

### **Rationale.**

I hold that learning is socially embedded, and mutually constructed through **co-participation in instructional and procedural conversations**. This study focuses upon the processes which give rise to those conversations, which take place in assigned tasks. **Pupils' learning identities and interests** feed recursively into the desire to participate in learning conversations. These identities evolve through previous experience in learning situations, **structural positions** of learners and others' responsive behaviours to them.

In my opinion, procrastinating behaviours have implications for effective teaching and learning, both at the classroom and national level. My primary concern is that in assigned tasks in the classroom, procrastinating behaviours not only reduce the opportunities for instructional conversations, but impoverish the potential quality of **dialogue** and the development of **discursive skills**. Secondly, they deny the teacher access to accurate **assessment** of the child's existing knowledge, skills and strategies in order to move the child to potential learning. They reduce opportunities for the child to demonstrate understanding and build relationships. With insufficient information about the child's existing knowledge and skills, the teacher **differentiates** the tasks in order to encourage participation. Research suggests that progressive differentiation may lead to lower **teacher expectation** (Visser 1993). This in turn can lead to restricted learning opportunities, not only for the child, but for those sharing the



learning situation. Without active, intentional participation, the learning community in which the child operates is denied access to thoughts, skills and strategies which may be used creatively. Thirdly, those behaviours powerfully challenge the **control** of the teacher or alternatively may serve as a screen for learners to relinquish control of their own learning. If repeated, procrastinating behaviours may become part of the child's **learning identity** with implications for future learning.

Procrastinating behaviours may also be seen as an issue in terms of national concerns. The top-down imposition of the National Curriculum (1986), together with drives for 'raising standards' and 'meeting targets', have introduced demands for greater efficiency and time management in schools. At the institutional level, increased efficiency brings increased economics, status and public kudos. Research in school effectiveness has drawn attention to the time children spend 'off task', (Bell et al. 1976, Rutter et al. 1979, Bennett 1976, Bennett et al. 1984, Bennett and Cass 1988, Mortimore et al. 1988, Alexander et al. 1989, 1995, Bennett and Dunne 1992, Alexander 1995). Paradoxically, the quantified reports of 'time off task' in these process-product studies have focused attention upon individuals' needs in terms of learning. This has led to a movement of teaching practices geared towards differentiation to match tasks to learners' competencies, which in the process can lower teacher and pupil expectation. An understanding which goes beyond description of 'off task' behaviours is necessary to review present teaching practices and capitalise upon learners' interests, self motivation and potential learning.

In summary, procrastinating behaviours can be disruptive to learning for both child and community. The teacher gives an '*unequal investment*' of time and attention (Pollard and Bourne, 1994, p.147) to these behaviours in order to encourage participation in learning conversations. It is in the interests of all involved in the learning situation to reduce procrastination and thus increase participation and learning.

### **My research questions.**

The purpose of this study is to understand the issue of procrastinating behaviours through the perspectives of participants, inductively and incrementally adding to existing knowledge or theories concerning procrastinating behaviours. In order to fulfil this purpose my research questions are:

- What possible interpretations of procrastinating behaviours are offered by social constructivist theories of learning?
- In individual and collaborative group assigned tasks, what are the links between the communicative process and procrastinating behaviours?
- What are the relationships between individual learning identities and procrastinating behaviours?
- In the recursive sequence of teaching, learning and assessment, what role does the distribution of power play in the incidence of procrastinating behaviours?

These questions have arisen from my own educational practice and the dilemmas I face in my dual roles of 'educationist' and 'teacher' (Pollard and Filer, 1999, p.12). I use the following strategies in order to observe, analyse and understand the incidence of procrastinating behaviours in assigned tasks within my classroom. Insights gained will inform and improve my practice; wider dissemination is aimed at helping other teachers to develop professional awareness of the problem, judgement and expertise. I aim to:

- Explore the theoretical implications of procrastinating behaviours for the learning of five children who are the focus of my research.
- Examine the communicative processes associated with a variety of tasks which differ in nature and purpose, with the aim of discerning responsive patterns. I consider the multiple perspectives of the child, myself as the teacher and task setter, myself as the observer and researcher, and the learner's peers.
- Assess my understanding of the procrastinating behaviours, gained through engagement in this study. I suggest what may give rise to the

behaviours, how teacher and learner may jointly reduce them and strategies which may replace them, increasing participation.

### **Themes in the study.**

Procrastinating behaviours inhibit essential action. In order to understand these behaviours I look at the learning context in which they originate. In this research two themes are dominant, **theories of learning and communication**. The strands within the theme of **theories of learning** are in the main concerned with ‘educationist’ perspectives in assigning tasks;

**perspectives of procrastination  
tensions and dilemmas,  
task organisation and management.**

Strands within the theme of **communication** are concerned with the inter-related perspectives of ‘teacher’ and learner engaging in assigned tasks. These are

**creating common shared understanding,  
learning identities,  
power,  
assessment.**

Procrastinating behaviours may be indicative of lapses in communication and in relationships within the task setting. These themes and strands are chosen because within the theoretical framework I establish, they reflect my interest with the interplay of communicative processes, both explicit and implicit, and with relationships, both cognitive and affective, in the assigned task setting. Their scope covers the management of learning through tasks, from planning, to implementation, assessment and evaluation.

### **My personal theory of effective learning.**

My personal theory of learning is grounded in social constructivist (Vygotsky 1962, 1978, Bruner 1986, 1990, 1996) and symbolic interactionist theories of learning (Mead, 1934), together with my own classroom practice over twenty three years and research evidence of this

study. It has evolved since the strong Piagetian influences of my 'progressive' training (Piaget, 1932, 1962), and most recently is influenced by 'situated learning' (Lave, 1988, 1992, Lave and Wenger, 1991, Rogoff, 1989, 1990, 1993, 1999). My theory of learning holds that the child has a central role as active constructor of meaning through discourse. The child constructs meaning as a member of a community, whilst in part constituting that community. The task becomes meaningful to the child only in the action of engagement. Child, activity and community are mutually constituting and interdependent. Their interdependence and mutuality mean that no single aspect may be analysed without recognition of the contribution of the others.

In my research, I examine the teacher's role in planning and delivering the task, its purpose, nature and communication. Pedagogic skills are as relevant to what constitutes good learning, as the child's knowledge, skills and understanding. The teacher has a role to perform which goes beyond the identification of procrastinating behaviour and includes determining the existing level of understanding. This occurs in the process of interaction. The child shows by verbal or non-verbal means that he or she is aware of a change in understanding, and can reflect upon that change or demonstrate it through activity. The active participation that I assess feeds into the activities I provide for future learning. Motivation to participate in active learning derives from existing experience and impels future action, therefore the joint action of teacher and learner influences participation. Procrastinating behaviours are disruptive to this process.

The learners' interpretations of the task, intentions and strategic actions are considered, again highlighting the inter-relatedness of teacher and learner roles. Both teacher and learner reflect upon the dynamic interactions of themselves as actors, within and of the class community, and upon the task. They become conscious of ways in which meanings are negotiated and through which social and cultural norms are learned. Inherent in the act of reflection is potential for the reduction of procrastinating behaviours, for reflection lends consciousness.

Pupils who repeatedly procrastinate concern me, for they do not appear to be learning at the same rate as their peers, as judged against task criteria common to all participants. Some examples of the behaviours which at the outset I found problematical are: failure to settle to a task within the first five minutes, failure to inquire when uncertain, appropriate tasks not completed within the time scale allowed, reinterpretation of tasks to repeat previous attainments, and interruption to others engaged in tasks.

### **An ethnographic approach.**

I adopt an ethnographic approach because it is best suited to my role as teacher- researcher, engaged with children in my own class. It allows me to take a broad perspective of the issue with which I am concerned, in the learning context of the classroom. The ethnographic style of reporting is suited to the audience of teacher practitioners I wish to reach. I use a theoretical framework of social constructivism in the institutional setting of an infant classroom. The methodological framework, which allows me to look at the classroom as the context for learning, addresses both how learning is constructed through participation, and the features of that context which may influence the incidence of procrastinating behaviours. The combination of theoretical and methodological frameworks will I believe, allow me to achieve my aims and relate these to other institutional settings which share the same characteristics.

### **The school.**

This research takes place in a local authority primary school, now forty years old, with an Early Years Unit attached. At the start of this study, there are two hundred and forty pupils. The school, a glass and pre-cast concrete building on two floors, is set amongst local authority housing. A large playing field to the rear, and two playgrounds to the side, including an area of wooden climbing apparatus, wrap around the classrooms. Two other primary schools are situated within half a mile east and north from the school. All three schools serve families which are, in the main, engaged in local trade and light industry. Children enter the Early Years Unit at the age of four where they follow a High Scope programme. They remain in the

Unit for the Reception year, transferring to Year 1 in September following their fifth birthday. They progress by year groups to Year 6 when they transfer to one of four comprehensive schools. My own role in the school is Special Needs Co-ordinator, and class teacher initially for Year 1, moving to year 2 with the children in this study.

The children in this study are five boys from Year 1, which is made up of seven girls and twenty three boys. Ten have experienced three terms in Reception, eight two terms and twelve one term. The class has additional adult support for four hours a week, when a Learning Support Assistant works with small groups of children.

The Year 1 and Year 2 classrooms.

Diagram 1.1. Seating plan of the Year 1 Classroom.

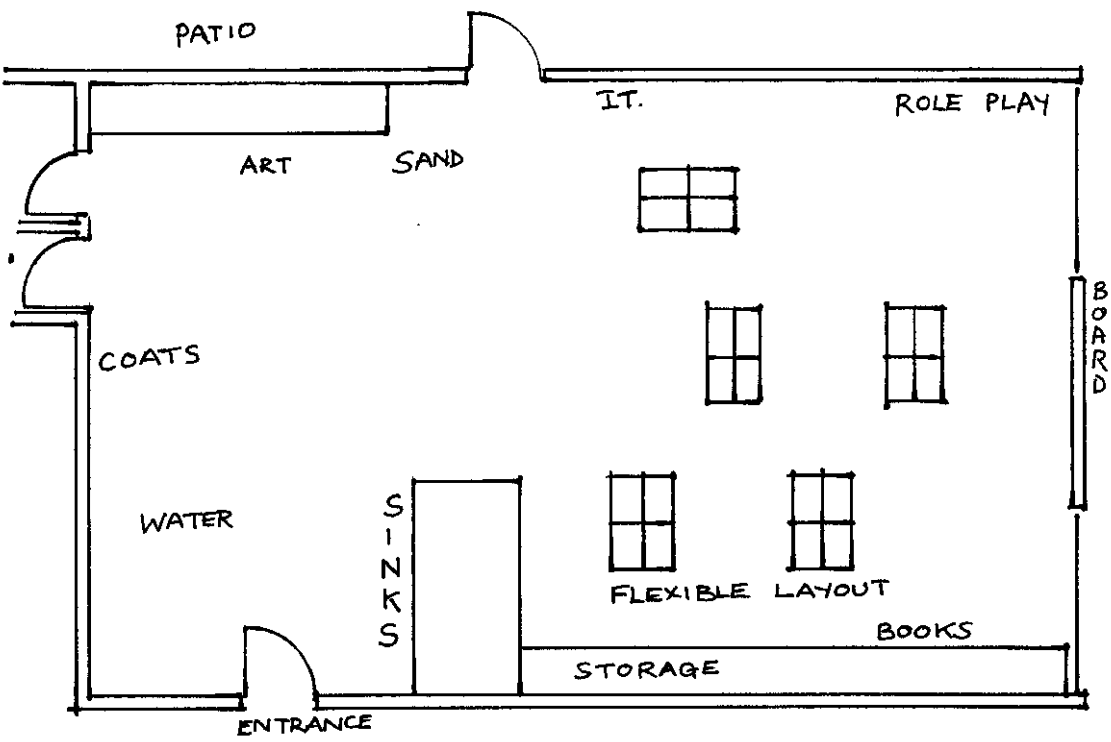
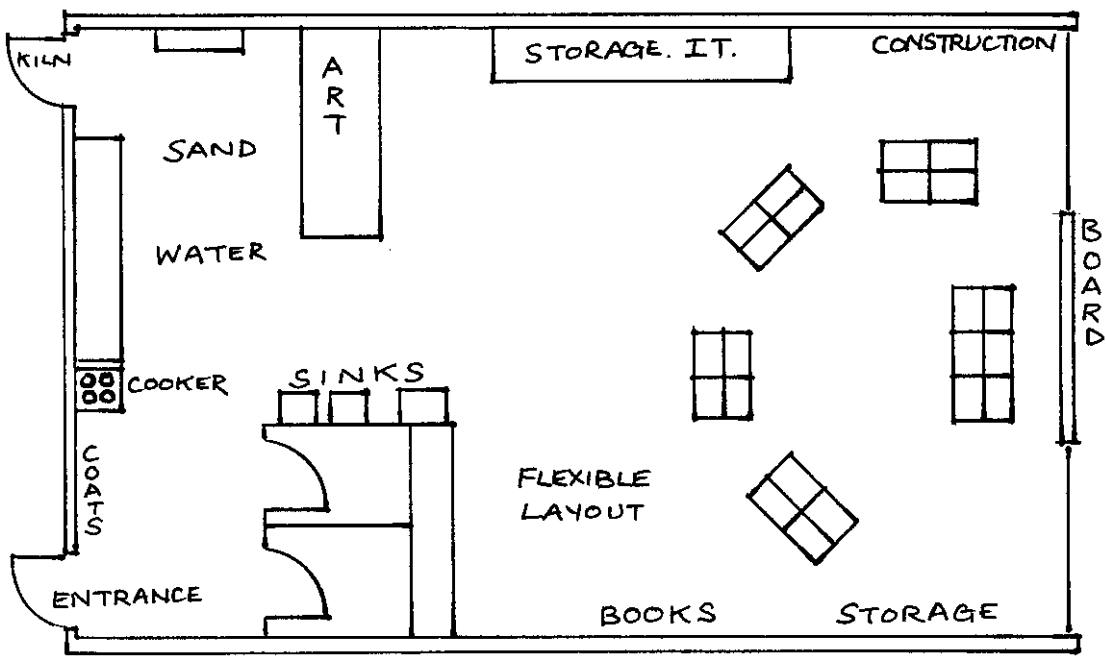


Diagram 1.2. Seating plan of the Year 2 classroom



### **The outline of this study.**

This study gives an account in five case studies of procrastinating behaviours in an infant classroom. The account covers a period as the children progressed through Key Stage 1, from the age of five to seven years. In Chapter 2 I review the literature relating to procrastinating behaviours in primary classrooms. Following the Introduction, in Section ii I ask how procrastinating behaviours may be variously interpreted in constructivist perspectives. I examine constructivist, Piagetian, Vygotskian, symbolic interactionist and situated cognitivist theories of learning, focusing upon the co-participatory role of learners in learning conversations. I reflect upon the tensions between theory and practice. In Section iii I explore the assigned task, its organisation and management, from the teacher's perspective and demonstrate with reference to school effectiveness studies, the reality of these tensions between theory and practice. I argue that the focus upon 'time-off-task' raised awareness of the incidence of off-task behaviours, yet did not pay due regard to the pupil's interpretation of the learning situation, due to methodological constraints. In Section iv I consider the incidence of procrastinating behaviours in relation to creating shared common understanding, suggesting features of the communicative process inherent in the task that may give rise to procrastinating behaviours. In Section v I take the child's perspective, drawing upon what is communicated socially and culturally which impinges upon motivation and the desire to participate. Learning identities are considered from the symbolic interactionist viewpoint, considering how they are formed and what impact they may have for procrastinating behaviours. I examine the structural positions of teachers and learners, and the use of power within the task cycle of teaching, learning and assessment. To close the Chapter I summarise the literature in relation to my research questions.

Chapter 3 begins with a critique of ethnographic methodologies. In section ii I show how the case studies were selected and give cameo descriptions of the children. Section iii considers the ethical issues, whilst Section iv describes the methods of data collection and analysis. Finally in Section v I



consider the implications of engaging in ethnography for my professional development.

Analysis of the data, with reference to the literature forms Chapter 4. I begin by introducing my typology of behaviours, then in Section ii interpret the described behaviours from social constructivist perspectives. I suggest scaffolding, though potentially effective in reducing procrastinating behaviours is difficult to achieve in practice. The third section of this Chapter is concerned with the implications of task organisation and management for procrastinating behaviours. Fourthly, I interpret the data to show how those behaviours may be reduced by teachers and learners through creating shared understanding. I go on to consider the role of learning identities in the incidence of procrastinating behaviours, and the impact of the use of power. Finally in this Chapter I look at the implications of my research findings for primary practice.

The concluding chapter, Chapter 5, sets out my findings in relation to the conceptual background of the study. It looks at the practical and theoretical significance of the research and suggests how the present findings may be developed.

## CHAPTER 2: PERSPECTIVES ON PROCRASTINATING BEHAVIOURS FROM THE LITERATURE.

### i. Introduction.

The two themes of this study are **learning theory** and **communication**. Because I hold a social constructivist view of learning, I believe procrastination is detrimental to learning and value dialogue and community participation. Fundamental to the active construction of learning is the role of communication, discourse and discursive skills. **Communication** is defined as the act of imparting information, **discourse** is the conversation through which prior knowledge is passed to and fro, consciously and unselfconsciously, to bring about change in thinking which leads to learning, and **discursive skills** are those skills practised in conversation which bring about reasoning. This reasoning marks the learner's awareness of his or her role in changing learning.

I argue that procrastinating behaviours may occur when a child's efforts to access and appropriate the necessary knowledge and skills from one or more experienced others, are insufficiently supported through the communicative processes. The child's subjective interpretation of the elements of assigned tasks may not make sense or hold interest so may be re-interpreted in an effort to make them meaningful. This can challenge the intentions of the teacher, and signal the need for discourse in order to share the same understanding of the task. My argument is structured on a theoretical framework of social constructivist views of learning, with particular reference to perspectives on **participation through discourse**.

In addition, I argue from my symbolic interactionist view that procrastinating behaviours are related to the child's structural position, learning identity, and his or her efforts to share the attitudes of co-participants in the learning community of which he or she is a member. I justify my views with reference to a wide range of research including work in the social constructivist and symbolic interactionist traditions, primarily Pollard (1982, 1985, 1987, 1994), Pollard and Filer (1996, 1999), Pollard et al. (1997) and work in situated learning including Lave

(1988), Chaiklin and Lave (1996), Rogoff (1989, 1990, 1993, 1999) and Rogoff et al. (1984).

An initial review of the literature on procrastinating behaviours seemed to suggest that studies which might inform the issue, had been positivist in nature (for example Dweck and Reppucci, 1973, Diener and Dweck, 1980, Dweck, 1986). They had concluded that such behaviours were attributable to ‘in - child’ causes. In reaching these conclusions, I felt that important features of the learning situation had been suspended in order to focus on the individual. The classroom context, with which I am concerned, is a social context, and to view an individual without regard for the communicative processes inherent in that context, in my opinion contradicts the reality. In engaging with this study, I aim to relocate procrastination in the ethnographic paradigm.

## **ii. Perspectives of procrastinating behaviours in social constructivist theories of learning.**

### **An overview.**

The essence of all constructivist theories of learning is the intellectually *active* role of the learner, in constructing meaning. Procrastinating behaviours defer active goal-directed participation, and as such detract from purposeful engagement in assigned tasks.

Social constructivist theories differ in their emphasis on the *active* role of participants. In brief, I suggest procrastinating behaviours in the Piagetian view would be regarded as indicative of a state of unreadiness. As a result the child would be protected against any challenge which was beyond his or her stage of development, avoiding a sense of failure.

In the Vygotskian view, the teacher working with the child would model or demonstrate the intended learning, holding features of the task in mind for the child until such time as he or she appropriated that learning from the teacher. As the child built on existing knowledge and skills, it would be incumbent upon the teacher to know the child’s present experience and

plan for potential learning. In this theory any procrastinating behaviours could be interpreted as a mismatch between the teacher's assessment of the child's existing capabilities and the child's potential learning. Alternatively, procrastinating behaviours could be interpreted as engagement in 'inner speech', participating passively in the process of transferring knowledge from the *intermental* to the *intramental* planes.

In the symbolic interactionist view, procrastinating behaviours would be seen as the manifestation of an affective state. The concept of 'self' would be developed as the individual interpreted the responses of others to their own actions. Reflection upon procrastinating behaviours in this paradigm would lead to examination of the classroom relationships, values and beliefs which are socio-culturally created and often implicit in the learning situation.

Finally, the situated cognitivists, would consider procrastinating behaviours in the mutually constitutive arena of co-participants. The behaviours would be seen in relation to the learning context and the purposive nature of the intended learning. I now relate these theoretical perspectives to the behaviours which concern me, beginning with the Piagetian view.

### **The Piagetian paradigm.**

My own beliefs and values derive from the period when I began teaching in the 'progressive' era, which was characterised by child centred pedagogy, discovery methods and notions of 'readiness'. These arose from the work of Piaget (1932, 1950, 1960), and were legitimated in education by the Plowden Report, (1967). Effective learning in Piaget's model constituted the *active search* for meaning which led to *patterns of meaning*. In the process of learning, exploratory transactions with the world would generate questions which were explored and reformulated in the light of previous experiences. These *patterns of meaning* comprised previous background experiences which Piaget (1950) called *schemes* or *structures*. The child learning first perceived the new reality (**assimilation**) then changed the *scheme* or *structure* to **accommodate** the new reality,

achieving **equilibration**. When equilibration occurred, a procedure was available for solving the same problem in a new situation. In this view, apparent procrastinating behaviours could be attributed to the search for meaning in relation to previous background experiences.

The most salient feature of Piagetian theory for me as I began my career, was Piaget's norm referenced **stage theory**, which was based on the assumption that children's ability was fixed and that they progressed through a fixed sequence of universal stages. It was a psychological view of learning, extrapolated from clinical research to pedagogy; a developmental framework for learning, based on **individual action** within a physical environment. In brief, Piaget wrote of four stages of development. The *sensori-motor period* was dominated by perceptions and interactions with a present world. The child's **innate potential** for intellectual development, led him or her to extract information from the environment spontaneously, through his or her actions **in relation to that environment**. The *pre-operational period* was differentiated from the previous period by an increase in the frequency of internalised representations of the world. In the *period of concrete operation* the child could appreciate **reversibility** and could therefore deduce from existing experiences. The *period of formal operations* was characterised by the child's problem solving in abstractions. Procrastinating behaviours could be interpreted as a stage of development, within the child, from concrete experiences to abstraction.

The stage model implied a logical maturational development and was in keeping with Piaget's interest in **structure and organisation**. He held that these stages were not intended as maturational stages in the sense that age appropriate labels could be assigned to them. The child, bound by innate ability, was responsible for his or her movement through the stages. In Piaget's view it would be useless to instruct a child in a concept unless he or she was at the appropriate stage, and was therefore biologically and intellectually equipped to internalise the new concept.

Piaget's assessment whether children had internalised concepts was based on **logicism**. The errors he observed were interpreted as 'within child' errors. Subsequent work by Donaldson (1978 ) Wood (1988) McGarrigle and Donaldson (1974) amongst others, have highlighted the inadequacy of Piaget's explanations for the errors observed. These writers have outlined the influence of contextual, social, cultural and dynamic linguistic elements largely ignored by Piaget.

In summary, effective learning in Piagetian terms was the internalisation of an external activity. Internalisation occurred through assimilation and accommodation into a pre-ordained consciousness. The learner's role was to actively seek pattern and change in his or her actions with the environment. In confrontation with everyday experiences the child learned to accommodate and accumulate concepts which were stored for application to similar experiences in new situations. Piaget depicted a fixed notion of learning, based upon innate ability and singular effort of the child in constructing meaning. In this view, the responsibility and control for learning rested primarily with the learner and the teacher's role was restricted to facilitating that learning.

What are the implications of procrastinating behaviours in the Piagetian paradigm? Learning, in Piagetian terms, is the accumulation of concepts through internalisation. 'Accumulation' has connotations of ownership, in the sense that knowledge may be possessed by some to the exclusion of others. There is evidence in this study that children share this view of learning, (Chapter 4, Luke (3) and Daniel (2)). As a result, a group of learners may remain on the periphery of the shared context the teacher provides, by virtue of their innate potential or stage of 'readiness'. If I view procrastinating behaviours through Piagetian eyes, I might conclude that the child in question either had not been endowed with the necessary intellectual capacity to meet the requirements of the task or had not reached the appropriate stage of readiness. My expectations of the child would be lowered and consequently I might provide more practice tasks until such time as the concepts in focus were internalised. Daniel

procrastinated intermittently throughout a practical mathematical task involving tallying to twenty (Chapter 4, Daniel (11)). An interpretation of the behaviours in this paradigm would suggest that Daniel as an individual did not have the necessary skills to engage in this task, given the facilitation in terms of resources. In fact, following a conversation with him it appeared that his interpretation of the task demands was in excess of the teacher's intended learning objective. My response may have been to provide more practice tasks reinforcing existing skills, with the risk of losing challenge and his interest, together with not moving his learning forward.

What happens then, when learning does not 'unfold' in accordance with the developmental norm Piaget suggested in his stage theory? Procrastinating behaviours would be explained in terms of individual maturation. Gary in a drama task (9) I describe in Chapter 4, appeared to be 'left behind' the action of his peers, shadowing them and imitating. Arguably in this paradigm, his actions were indicative of his level of maturation. In interview he indicated a perception of his role which placed him on an equal footing with his peers in his world. Notions of maturation alone are inadequate when seeking to understand procrastinating behaviours. The potential of communicative processes between teacher and learner is largely ignored in this perspective. In my view, the teacher must promote learning by sharing in the child's activity of creating meaning. Vygotsky's model of learning offered the teacher a joint commitment with the child, for their mutual learning.

### **The Vygotskian paradigm.**

In this view, procrastinating behaviours would be seen to have an origin not solely within the child, but somewhere within the learning situation, as part of the context which may include the teacher's behaviour and intentions. The Vygotskian perspective included the social context of the child's learning, most importantly the social origin of language which was neglected by Piaget.

Human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them.

Vygotsky 1978: 88

To which Bruner (1996) adds:

.....human learning ...is best when it is participatory, proactive, communal and given over to constructing meanings rather than receiving them.

Bruner 1996:15

This inclusion of social activity obscured boundaries between formal and informal learning situations, for both contributed to the child's existing skills and knowledge upon which potential learning was structured. Learning, thinking and communicating were simultaneously developed through the context of instruction, yet not as the focus of instruction. Learning proceeded from the social and cultural experiences of a child, mediated by more experienced members of that social and cultural experience, to become part of the psychological plane. Vygotsky wrote;

Any function in the child's cultural development appears twice, or in two planes. First it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First it appears between people as an inter-psychological category, and then within the child as an intrapsychological category. This is equally true with regard to voluntary attention, logical memory, the formation of concepts, and the development of volition.

Vygotsky 1978:163

The social activity then facilitated the mental, in all learning, including voluntary attention. As Vygotsky focused upon intentional learning, I draw parallels between voluntary attention described here, and the voluntary attention which in part constitutes the act of classroom learning. I interpret this to indicate that voluntary attention in a social situation is the precursor to learning. Procrastinating behaviours lead to intermittent or alternative focus in attention and hence are obstacles to the fluency of the activity which constitutes learning. The challenge for this study is to determine



which strategies may guide the selective attention, to meet the teacher's intention. Luke in the literacy hour, referred to in Chapter 4 (16), appeared to be attending selectively yet seemed to satisfy the learning objective as set by the teacher. In conversation after the task it became apparent that he had not experienced the necessary challenge during the task and had found this privately, in his personal interests. His cultural development was not in question, for he was certainly co-operating and developing volition, arguably making good use of time when he felt unchallenged. What is called into question is the challenge offered by the task which prompted the apparent procrastinating behaviours.

Movement from the *intermental* to the *intramental* plane may be compared to Piaget's internalisation. He saw egocentric speech as an external regulation by the child learning to communicate and take the views of others into account. When the child had developed beyond the egocentric stage, then internalisation rendered egocentric speech redundant. Vygotsky, on the other hand, maintained that language developed through social and inner speech, inner speech being concerned with word *meanings*.

Inner speech is not the interior aspect of external speech  
- it is a function in itself. It still remains speech, i.e.  
thought is embodied in words, in inner speech words die  
as they bring forth thought. Inner speech is to a large  
extent thinking in pure word meanings.

Vygotsky 1962:149

Luke when solving problems, frequently confirmed for himself, aloud, what he already knew before testing his ideas (Chapter 4, (1)). As learning in this paradigm was constructing meaning, then inner speech prevailed and guided the learner in reaching consciousness, which was regulated for the novice through the actions and speech of others.

Learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in co-operation with his peers. Once these processes are

internalised, they become part of the child's independent developmental achievement.

Vygotsky 1978: 90

In this view, the act of participation in both social and inner speech is instrumental in transformation from *intermental* to *intramental* planes. Are the children who exhibit apparent procrastinating behaviours in fact engaged in inner speech? Without the interplay with social speech it is impossible to say. However, with deferred participation the learning process may not run its intended course. Understanding may remain partial and inadequate. Andrew in a mathematical task (Chapter 4 (22)), which involved interpreting pictorial number stories then representing them as symbols, rejected all attempts at interaction. He maintained he knew what to do and had completed the problems correctly, although he was in fact in error. His repeated procrastination meant that his understanding was partial on this occasion. Internalisation awaited new opportunities.

In Vygotskian theory, potential was not a fixed characteristic as in the Piagetian paradigm. Potential learning was actively constructed in the *Zone of Proximal Development*. Children's developmental level was demonstrated by their ability to problem solve independently. In this paradigm what they learned with assistance, would go beyond what they demonstrated in a problem solving situation unassisted, as shown in Chapter 4 (1) (19). Vygotsky termed the interval between the two performances the *Zone of Proximal Development*, that is

the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by individual problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or collaboration with more able peers.

Vygotsky 1978: 86

In order to assist performance effectively, the teacher had to know the existing level of performance, and those features of the task, context and child's development which were necessary in order to move them through the *ZPD*. Unlike movement through Piaget's stages, the child was not

alone, but supported strategically and through discourse, by a more experienced teacher until such time as the learner achieved self-regulation. Learning was not preordained or the sole property of an individual learner, but a shared activity which brought shared responsibility for its sustained development. The **role of the teacher** changed from the Piagetian role of facilitator to mediator as I show in Luke's task Chapter 4 (1). At the outset of the task when Luke envisaged working without support, he appeared to be procrastinating, yet with 'scaffolding' he achieved beyond both our expectations.

Bruner and Haste (1987) referred to the means by which learning was shared as 'scaffolding'. This may have been in intentional instruction, in providing a stimulating environment or in play situations. The environment under consideration expanded from the physical environment, which may have included the teacher as facilitator, to the social environment which may have included the teacher as mediator. Initially support for the novice was structured to extend existing levels of performance. By holding in mind features of the task complexity for the child, the tutor focused his or her attention on the new skill. As the child increased in confidence, the scaffolding faded to allow the child self - regulation in performance of the task. In self - regulation, the child grew in consciousness both of the meanings being constructed and his or her own role in constructing that meaning. Cognitive and social worlds intermeshed through the action of **discourse and reflection**. In relating this description of scaffolding to the procrastinating learners, I envisage that the low level activity through which the learner is initially engaged would be likely to remain such without the support of task relevant discourse. In the action of discourse and reflection, the scaffolded structure is marked and sustained. Discourse and reflection link existing learning to potential learning, and purposively re-instate the procrastinating learner in the context, as was Luke described above.

Where Vygotsky wrote of the child 'imitating' the adult, Bruner (1985) saw this activity as *a loan of consciousness*.

(A teacher) serves the learner as a vicarious form of consciousness until such time as the learner is able to master his own action.

Bruner 1985:24

This *consciousness* brought about through discourse and developing discursive skills, led to the child's realisation of his or her role as a learner. It went beyond imitation and replication to a more dynamic interchange between active participants. Meaning was negotiated through the interactional processes, both verbal and non-verbal. The child tested out and discussed interpretations of what he or she was experiencing. In so doing culture was at one and the same time created and confirmed in a mutually constitutive act. In Vygotsky's 'imitation' an end result is implied. Procrastinating behaviours in these terms would lead to lost opportunities. With Bruner's addition of *a loan of consciousness* there are options for accommodating change and the creation of new entry points. Procrastinating behaviours could be viewed as part of the effort for negotiating meaning.

In the Vygotskian paradigm, 'scaffolding' was based on a two person interaction. Curriculum learning usually involves multiple interpretations of one initiating stimulus by groups of learners, and the outcomes reflect this. Bruner (1996) likened the curriculum to

...an animated conversation on a topic that can never be fully defined, although one can set limits on it.

Bruner 1996:15

The *multiplicity of interpretations within this animated conversation* may contribute to the incidence of procrastinating behaviours. In organisational terms, the numbers acting as novices in teacher-assigned tasks tend to preclude simultaneous 'scaffolding', for each brings differing prior knowledge. In cognitive terms, multiple *zones of proximal development* are elusive and efforts to match tasks to existing proficiencies would be destined to veer off course occasionally. It is possible that those who are not reached are those who exhibit procrastinating behaviours in some contexts. The 'spontaneous' learning that arises from the child's existing

representations receives less attention in the Vygotskian paradigm, yet this may play an important role in the learning community, confirming and allowing the child to reflect on his or her role in creating opportunities for others to practise discursive skills. Those who procrastinate in this study show how spontaneous learning replaces intended learning, ongoingly altering the tasks to accommodate what they know and practise as Daniel did in Chapter 4 (3).

The teacher - learner relationship in Bruner's 'scaffolding' is important to goal-directed learning. In order to manage the task setting and implementation, the teacher builds a knowledge of the child through time and diagnostic assessment. This occurs before, during and after a goal-directed task, child and teacher progressively internalising their knowledge. It may be applied to both Piagetian and Vygotskian paradigms, which imply that this knowledge is gained through activity in co-operation with the learner, but external to the action in focus. In situated learning, the relationship of the individual within and of the community in which he or she learns is equally important. In this paradigm, teacher and learner mutually construct knowledge of one another, simultaneously within the learning activity. It is not essential that one should be 'expert', but others should be more experienced.

### **Situated cognition.**

Construction of meanings is a spiralling, reiterative process, a gradual 'coming to know'. In this conception of learning which I share, procrastinating behaviours are a process of partial understanding en route to constructing meaning. Where Piaget and Vygotsky both concerned themselves with learning as the internalisation of conceptual and cognitive knowledge, Lave (1988), Lave and Wenger (1991) Chaiklin and Lave, (1996), Rogoff (1989, 1990,1993) focus upon the processes inherent in the social context and engagement with that context which provide optimum opportunity for learning to take place. This justifies my focus on *the communicative process*, Mercer (1995, p.1).

I believe that procrastinating behaviours impede learning through active participation. Rogoff (1993) proposes an analysis of participation in sociocultural activity, which suggests those procrastinating behaviours may have a participatory function. It offers a broad interpretation of participation which legitimises some behaviours I observe. *Apprenticeship* refers to the process by which individuals learn to become mature participants in culturally valued activity. The apprentice may participate in observation and learn to become a mature participant, without obvious contribution. I have found incidences of this in this study, where the learner observes others at work on the same task. Where this occurs it is followed with diagnostic conversations. However, not all the procrastinating behaviours lend themselves to legitimisation in this way. Those that do not, may result from clashes between what is culturally valued in the classroom and teacher and learner values.

*Apprenticeship* refers to the individual who, through personal activity, moves to the interpersonal in *guided participation*. In this process the individual co-ordinates his or her efforts in shared communication with the group or community. The necessary adjustments in co-ordinating may lead to asymmetric exchanges 'to stretch their common understanding' (Rogoff 1993, p.18). Apparent procrastinating behaviours may signal a period of adjustments. To confirm or disconfirm this, it would not be sufficient to observe, but to listen and inquire, which is what this study does.

The most encompassing plane of analysis Rogoff (1993) uses is that of the individual within the community. In *participatory appropriation* the individuals change through their participation, and are aware of that change in preparation for participation in subsequent similar activities. If all procrastinating behaviours pass for participation, the progress to change and full participation in sociocultural activity may be impeded. The discourse surrounding participation is vital to ascertaining the nature of participation. The ultimate goal of change occurs through participation. I suggest that steps taken by the teacher to counter procrastinating behaviours, would modify the quality of that change, had it been freely

initiated by the child. An example of this can be found in Gary's task, Chapter 4 (19).

Rogoff's analysis has much in common with Lave and Wenger's (1991) democratic view of learning;

Learning is a process that takes place in a participation framework, not in an individual mind. This means, among other things, that it is mediated by the differences in perspective among the co-participants. It is the community, or those participating in the learning context, who 'learn' under this definition. Learning is, as it were, distributed among co-participants, not a one-person act.

Lave and Wenger 1991: 15 -16

For those who procrastinate, their perspective on participation is positive;

Legitimate peripheral participation is proposed as a descriptor of engagement in social practice that entails learning as an integral constituent.....Peripherality suggests that there are multiple, varied, more - or less-engaged and -inclusive ways of being located in the fields of participation defined by a community. Peripheral participation is about being located in the social world. *Changing* locations and perspectives are part of actors' learning trajectories, developing identities, and forms of membership.

Lave and Wenger 1991:35-36

Participation is described as *full*, not *complete*, avoiding any foreclosing on knowledge domains or skill acquisition, whilst indicating the dynamic state of learning. Lave and Wenger suggest that there may be no such thing as 'illegitimate peripheral participation' (1991, p.35), for partial participation is an entry to the social world which allows access to others' thoughts. If full participation is necessary for learning to progress, and peripheral participation is legitimate, then in this perspective procrastinating behaviours can be construed as contributing to meaning making.

Lave (1988, p.77) claims that thinking which occurs in 'everyday' learning differs from that in curriculum learning. She cites Bartlett,

By everyday thinking I mean those activities by which most people , when they are not making any particular attempt to be logical or scientific, try to fill the gaps in information available to them.....

Bartlett 1958 : 164

In everyday learning meaningful contextual supports are available, and learning is 'of the moment', not contrived. Wood (1991) contributes to this discussion adding that the processes involved in learning in home and school are different because classroom and everyday discourses differ considerably from one another. I add further that the discourse which is featured in curriculum learning is intended to foster the learning of many simultaneously. Yet the two cultures and discourses of everyday and curriculum learning interweave, for one cannot exist without the other. The learner's task is to make sense through both worlds. Bruner (1996) says,

Although meanings are in the mind, they have their origins and their significance in the culture in which they were created. It is this cultural situatedness of meanings that assures their negotiability, and ultimately, their communicability.

Bruner 1996:3

When the child is inexpert at interpreting classroom discourse, this may give rise to procrastinating behaviours.

One feature of curriculum learning not addressed in situated cognition is that it is governed by allocations of time. Procrastinating behaviours are time management strategies which detract from its efficient use. McDermott (1996) writes,



Learning simply glosses that some persons have achieved a particular relationship with each other, and it is in terms of these relations that information necessary to everyone's participation gets made available in ways that give enough people time to get good at what they do.

Mc Dermott 1996:277

Swept up with a concern for time passing, I intuitively felt this valued time was lost. A second feature which is present in curriculum learning is the unequal distribution of power, not evident in this theoretical perspective. The evidence base I now have gives me opportunity to reflect upon procrastinating behaviours from theoretical perspectives and my own as practitioner.

### **Perceived tensions and dilemmas.**

In relation to this study, a first dilemma is concerned with individual and shared learning. Individual learning is private as in the Piagetian paradigm. Community learning is shared and involves enculturalisation, supported by social interaction, discourse and discursive skills. The Vygotskian perspective moves from the view of learning as a private possession to the more social dyadic novice-expert setting. Whilst this opens opportunities for discourse, I find there are organisational difficulties and time constraints in achieving this with large numbers of children. In keeping with the situated cognitivist perspective, I value group learning and believe learning to be a dynamic process involving multiple perspectives and subjective meanings, in a constant state of flux. It is not achieved by an individual, but appropriated until such time as it undergoes change through social action in a community. The dilemma lies in the fact that procrastinating behaviours lead me to focus on individuals and concentrate on means of compensating for learning opportunities that may be missed through the procrastination. This dilemma is difficult to resolve, for whilst I wish to foster the skills of collaboration, the behaviours bring me to focus on individual learning and by implication private accumulation of skills and knowledge. As Sfard (1998) said,

If people are valued and segregated according to what they have, the metaphor of intellectual property is more likely to feed rivalry than collaboration.

Sfard 1998:8

The lines of communication between group members in collaboration are greater than in the dyadic situation, and therefore potential for change which signals learning is increased. In collaboration the cultural influences maintain or promote learning within a group. An individual initiates activity for the mutual benefit of the group members. This has a stabilising influence in classroom settings. If procrastinating behaviours are introduced, the setting is destabilised. I see my role as teacher to become part of, whilst structuring, the sociocultural world with and for the individual. This co-participation, though important, is often not sufficient to promote learning and for some like Gary, described in Chapter 4 (9) (19), learning is peripheral for a disproportionate time. Of all the case studies, his 'conforming' behaviours are the most consistent across contexts and across time. I come to see him as an individual first, and a group member secondly.

A second dilemma lies in my 'educationist' role in fulfilling assessment requirements. Public summative assessment of individual attainment, based upon individual tasks, is now routine in primary classrooms. Vygotskian theory holds that the child's potential learning should be the focus in constructing learning experiences. This would indicate a need for more widespread acceptance of formative assessment as proposed by Torrance and Pryor, (1998). Formative assessment would lend insights into observed procrastinating behaviours where summative assessments would do no more than confirm existing levels of performance. Increasingly, it would seem, summative assessment of individuals is required to satisfy government demands under the guise of raising standards. Efforts to encourage collaborative working and thereby reduce procrastinating behaviours are in part thwarted by the need for public assessments for comparative purposes. A pluralistic pedagogy encourages adaptive strategies in individuals, to facilitate the various organisational procedures

which accompany imposed summative assessments. Learners adapt to apparent changes in teacher values. Collaborative learning and joint outcomes are encouraged in one activity, where the individuals act as resources for each other. In other activities individual tasks are set, requiring individual outcomes devoid of support. Learning and assessment become two separate processes, which have little to do with social constructivism, but more to do with behaviourist theories of learning. The reality is contradictory. Theoretically I strive to foster social constructivist ideals in the classroom. In practice, some of the tasks and strategies I use are influenced by behaviourist theories and an underlying transmission mode of teaching. I provide a stimulus, for example a list of spellings to be learnt; the child repeats the list and if the goal is achieved, I reward the effort in praise or extrinsically with credits. This tension between theory and practice has to do with the nature of intended learning and its measurement, and may contribute to the incidence of the observed behaviours.

Teaching, learning and assessment are inextricably linked; both teachers and learners grapple with the joint tasks of social and intellectual learning, (becoming a member of the community of learners and 'coming to know'), whilst fulfilling the curricular demands. I suggest whilst the curricular demands are explicitly managed, the socio-cultural aspects of learning are implicit and less frequently brought into consciousness through reflection. What then is absent from this analytical perspective of situated learning, which I find informative but insufficient? The focus children do participate in tasks in ways which may be described as partial, or delayed. They do so in some situations more readily than others, and in some situations only following intervention. My concern arises from my perception of time constraints and the imposition of curricular learning, in light of the control and responsibility for learning vested in me. Situated cognition as an analytical perspective does not help me to resolve the dilemmas I feel on these accounts. However, the value of Lave and Wenger's concept of legitimate peripheral participation 'derives from the richness of its interconnections' (1991:39) and as such, reflects the activity inherent in

classroom learning. It is these interconnections which I see as the basis for examining the procrastinating behaviours I observe, and from which my ethnographic approach comes.

### **Summary.**

I have shown how shifts in constructivism hold differing interpretations of procrastinating behaviours. In Piagetian terms, I would feel less morally responsible for addressing procrastinating behaviours as it would be interpreted as a stage of 'unreadiness' to match expectations. I would need to re-assess my level of expectation for the individual in the light of innate potential (which I find difficult to determine) and learning already possessed. My provision of tasks would need to be matched appropriately to the child's stage of development. I would await independent demonstration that a concept, externally given, is internalised to be used in a similar situation. In this view the periods of procrastination may be interpreted as periods for non-intervention, as the child is the prime mover through stages of development. In short, the child's inactivity may be met with inactivity from the teacher, leading to depressed performance and lowered expectation.

Piagetian theory left a positive legacy in its focus on the individual as a learner. The five individuals I focus upon in this research, whilst all exhibiting procrastinating behaviours, portray a variety of behaviours over a variety of contexts. Whilst I recognise these children act in relation to the community and environment in which they find themselves, I consider them first as individuals. I believe that as individuals their learning is impeded by their behaviours. It is required of me that I publicly assess their achievements as individuals. Above all, I need to understand what in my role contributes to the individual responses they offer to tasks.

In the Vygotskian model I would have ample opportunity to reach that understanding, if working in dyadic settings of intentional instruction. In reality this proves difficult on at least two accounts, first the organisational constraints of meeting the learning needs of groups of children who have

reached differing understandings simultaneously, and secondly the potential for 'scaffolding' learning is jeopardised by the procrastinating behaviours of the learner. Knowledge of the child is vital for ascertaining existing levels and potential levels of performance. This knowledge is not accessible when first getting to know a child, when moving across knowledge domains or when there are breakdowns in communication. It is possible that in the periods of apparent procrastinating behaviours, the child is engaged in 'inner speech'. 'Inner speech' which Vygotsky (1962:149) believed leads to the transformation of learning, when made explicit may be reviewed and developed, exposing any misconceptions. Procrastinating behaviours may originate in, or lead to further possible misconceptions. The teacher's response to them has the power to encourage or dissuade the child from participating.

With reference to social communication, from the child's perspective, before engaging in a task it is necessary to be interested, curious and eager to know. Clarity of purpose and shared understanding of the criteria by which success will be judged increase motivation to participate. The social communication that takes place provides the context through which socially and culturally established concepts are internalised. Through joint interaction the learner comes to understand the processes by which tasks are achieved as well as the task itself. In the Vygotskian paradigm, social communication is more widely conceived than in the Piagetian paradigm, yet more narrowly conceived than in the situated cognitivist paradigm.

Situated cognitivists view social communication as both talking and relationship building - relationships, both in the sense of interpersonal relationships and in the sense of seeing the relationship of new experiences in the context of previous existing knowledge, skills and experiences. In this view, responsibility for learning is mutually constituted in purposive activity within the learning community. Furthermore, the role of communicative processes, communication, discourse and discursive skills is given pre-eminence. Those processes bridge the learning situation and the developing learning, the sociocultural and the cognitive. They provide

access from individual to public knowledge. Procrastinating behaviours are interpreted proactively, as a constituent of the social communication inherent in tasks.

As constructivist theories of learning have developed, increasing importance has been attached to the communicative process in the learning situation. Communication emphasises the **shared** roles in creating meaning and understanding, and therein lies the potential for addressing procrastinating behaviours. To what extent do pedagogical practices and curriculum learning foster participation in discourse and discursive skills? School effectiveness studies have focused on the links between pedagogical practices and the communication of curriculum through assigned tasks. Responsive behaviours, including ‘off-task’ behaviours have comprised a major part of those studies.

### **iii. Assigned tasks.**

#### **School effectiveness studies.**

The assigned task is the site of the procrastinating behaviours; without the task there would be no responsive behaviours. Their inter-relationship leads me to consider what is communicated in the task which may help me to better understand the behaviours. With reference to school effectiveness studies by Bennett et al. (1984) and Alexander et al (1995), I take the teacher’s perspective of the task and ask what is communicated through its organisation and management.

Bennett et al.’s (1984) study, set out to establish the degree to which teachers matched tasks to children’s abilities, to study the responses to matched and mismatched tasks and relate patterns of responses to those tasks. The tasks were categorised after Norman (1978) according to the teacher’s intended learning in setting the task. In brief, the categories were *incremental*, *restructuring*, *enrichment*, *practice* and *revision* tasks. In *incremental* tasks new material was introduced, in *restructuring* tasks the learner worked with predominantly familiar material but, with prompts, constructed a new way of looking at a task. In *enrichment* tasks strategic

skills were applied to familiar knowledge in new contexts. *Practice* tasks demanded repetitive and rapid application of familiar skills and knowledge. *Revision* tasks (not taken from Norman (1976), but Bennett et al.'s (1984) own category in response to behaviours observed) kept existing skills in focus. In the data analysis, I show the inadequacy of the categories in respect of individual differences between learners and in respect of the interpretative nature of learning.

I interpret 'off-task' behaviours to include procrastinating, based on the observations reported by Bennett et al. (1984). They were led to conclude from non-participant observations of children and interviews with their teachers, that the teacher intention for the task was not met, in part because of a mismatch between the child's existing knowledge and experience and the new content of the task. This notion of matching tasks to existing levels of attainment reflects the Piagetian and Plowdenesque influences at the time of writing. The subjective interpretations of the tasks received little attention. Individuals attend to different features of a task depending on their existing experiences. Therefore a single task may be interpreted in different ways, no matter what the intended learning purpose. In the data analysis, I describe Joe in a science task (Chapter 4 (13)) which Bennett et al. (1984) would have categorised as *restructuring*. The learners were working with familiar materials but required to construct a new way of looking at a problem. Joe applied existing knowledge to the problem and the task for him became a *revision task*. What remains relevant to this study from the school effectiveness studies, is the challenge these behaviours presented to the established organisation and the importance of knowing learners in order to support them in their potential learning.

Alexander et al. (1995) acknowledged the difficulty in matching curriculum tasks to pupils' learning, and also the shortcoming of non-participant observation when assessing behaviours (Alexander 1995). Alexander et al. (1995) studied the responsive behaviours to teacher-devised tasks, focusing on the amount of attention or distraction they provoked. Task behaviour was categorised as *working* and *task-related routine, awaiting attention* and

*distracted*. It is in this final category that I suggest ‘off-task’ behaviours and procrastinating behaviours, although sharing some similarities, are not the same. The difference lies in the interpretation of what constitutes *distracted* behaviour. This Alexander et al. (1995) define as ‘anything other than task related’ (p.7), yet Rogoff (1993) and Lave and Wenger (1991) propose that participation may be passive. Again, the potential of discourse and participant observation to increase our understanding of *distracted* behaviours is evident.

Alexander et al. (1995), implied that it is the nature of tasks which encourage distraction, and that the same behaviours are generally present across a class group, intermittently for the duration of the task. My concern is with a cluster of children who appear to behave differently from peers in the same setting. Alexander et al. (1995) suggested collaborative tasks encouraged high levels of attention,

some of the commonest classroom tasks may actively discourage pupil involvement simply because they are more appropriate for individuals in isolation than for a busy classroom setting.....Tasks involving interaction and collaboration appear to be far more suitable for such a setting, and the evidence offered here is that they may also encourage high levels of work and low levels of distraction.

Alexander et al 1995 : 10

They found that children appeared to spend less time ‘on task’ in activities like reading and writing, and more time in those activities which involved talking. Earlier, Bennett et al. (1984) had found that task-related talk comprised only three quarters of talk recorded during the course of observed tasks. Only sixteen percent of the recorded talk was children sharing knowledge, receiving or giving explanations. I have found differential responses to tasks in the children I have observed. Gary, Daniel and Andrew tended to adapt collaborative to individual tasks and task related talk was minimal. Joe and Luke were inclined to pursue roles as collaborators, or to use talk as a diversion from the demands of the task.



Whilst I value discourse as a means of creating meaning and shared understanding, and plan for collaborative tasks, I need to maintain the prerogative of setting individual tasks for some assessment purposes. It is essential that the children develop a flexible repertoire of strategies in response to tasks and a balance between cognitive and social talk. At the same time it is essential that those responses are the most appropriate to meet the demands of the task, and that learners do not choose procrastinating behaviours.

Whilst school effectiveness studies raise awareness of 'off-task' behaviours, which bear similarity with procrastinating behaviours, the quantification of their incidence does not lend understanding from teacher and pupil perspectives. Paradoxically, such studies have led to measures which look at individual differences in learners and measures to encourage participation through differentiation. Yet to differentiate in planning tasks implies a static view of learning, an acceptance that learning will not progress at the same rate for an individual as for peers. To differentiate teaching style to meet preferred learning styles, supported with appropriate resources, would be more in keeping with a social constructivist view and is an issue for this study.

### **Task organisation and management.**

An effective teacher plans tasks to share knowledge that individuals will appropriate at a level just beyond what they would have achieved independently. Alexander (1995) cites Bennett et al.'s 1984 study,

Bennett showed how even talented teachers find the matching of task to pupil difficult, and how frequently their task intentions are not realised in practice, in part because of problems in their management of classroom time and events.

Alexander 1995 : 5

Alexander (1995) defines the effective teacher as

someone with a repertoire of diverse organisational strategies and teaching techniques, grounded in clearly

articulated goals and secure knowledge of subject matter and pupil learning, who then selects from this pedagogical repertoire according to the unique practical needs and circumstances of his or her professional situation .....

Alexander 1995 : 2

Within the culture of the classroom, in the action of sharing knowledge, the psychological aspects of giving voice to one's thoughts and coming to know oneself, follow. Planning for learning demands a flexibility which allows the teacher to promote the intended learning, and respond to spontaneous learning, for it can never be said with certainty what is to be learned, before we have learnt it. When inter-relationships within the circumstances lead to unpredictable responses, judgement has to be made as to how best to be effective for the greater number. The Plowden Report (1967) advocated teaching in groups on the grounds of sharing teacher time:

Only seven or eight minutes a day would be available for each child if all teaching were individual. Teachers therefore have to economise by teaching together a small group of children who are roughly at the same stage.

Plowden Report 1967: para. 754 -5

This now seems a simplistic view born of pragmatism, yet grouping continues to be a valued organisational strategy, promoting discourse.

Groupings are based on the assumptions a teacher makes about what the learners know or do not yet know, what they need to know and how they can best be encouraged. To address procrastinating behaviours this would seem to be an important feature of the task planning. The composition of those groups is more important than suggested by the Plowden Report (1967). Cohen et al (1990) claim that

...mixed status groupings engaged in collective tasks are dominated by high-status members and do not receive the benefit of the contribution of some low-status members.

Cohen et al 1990 : 203

As co-operative groupings are an arena for teaching children how to question and receive support, it is vital that all voices have the opportunity to be heard. Learning as a social activity must also involve social talk so that the group members learn to reflect, exchange ideas and views with others, and learn the meta-skills of how communication works. Bennett and Dunne (1992) relate group interactions to the nature of the task designs. The social demands of a practical task may be greater than the cognitive. For example in a drama task I describe in Chapter 4 (9), featuring Gary and Joe, the social and cognitive demands were balanced, and Gary's participation was encouraged. In other tasks imbalance between social and cognitive demands may have encouraged procrastinating behaviours. Whether the task is product orientated, a discussion, or a problem solving episode will determine the cognitive demands of the task which will be interpreted subjectively and differentially by the learners. Procrastinating behaviours may be reduced if the setting, in the form of the chosen group composition is supportive or conducive to allowing the child who procrastinates access to the knowledge to be shared through discourse. The composition alone is not significant, but also the differential methods of working to meet differential outcomes.

Alexander et al. (1995) claimed lack of pace in lessons contributed to 'off-task' behaviours. In the schools studied, the pace of lessons appeared not to motivate children and sustain interest in tasks. On a more optimistic note, Galton et al. (1999) claimed that 'overall levels of engagement in the 1990s were much higher than in the 1970s' (p.131). This he suggested was attributable to the changes in classroom organisation and management to meet teaching demands, particularly with regard to collaborative and whole class teaching. What Galton et al (1999) did not address, and what is an

important part of this study, is the strategic adaptive behaviours in individuals across different contexts. What motivates adaptive responses?

In situated cognition everyday learning is mediated by the motivation to become a member of a community of learners, and to use the support of those co-participants as resources to further understanding. Curriculum learning in assigned tasks frequently differs in that the level of abstraction required to reach that understanding is removed from the experience of individuals, and the natural supports which would accompany everyday learning are absent. Any shift from an individual learning in partnership with another, to individuals learning as a group, may lead to the understanding of one being taken as the general understanding of the group, leaving participants on the periphery and disadvantaged for future learning. Lave's (1991) suggests that the concept of 'illegitimate peripheral participant' (p.35) cannot be substantiated. This does not adequately legitimate peripheral participation when focusing upon assigned tasks which are externally driven, and in the main product oriented. For this to be so, an understanding of the child's participation would need to be reached through diagnostic conversation at the site of the procrastinating behaviours, in order to ensure the peripheral participation was goal directed.

#### **iv. Creating common shared understanding in tasks.**

Planning a task belongs in the province of teaching. The responsibility for presenting the task rests with the teacher, but is a joint activity with learners who may choose to comply with it, reject it or reframe it to meet their own expectations. Learners need to be clear about the purpose and requirements of the task, whether tasks are essentially problem-solving, production or discussion tasks cannot be left to interpretation. Bennett (1990) talks of tasks inappropriately presented due to lack of clarity, inadequate explanation, lack of necessary resource materials, or a mismatch between the teachers demands and what is assessed (p. 720). All of these could contribute to procrastinating behaviours for all learners unsure of direction.

Communication operates explicitly and implicitly in the course of an assigned task. It may be verbal or non - verbal, historical or 'of the moment', considered or spontaneous. Its aim is for the teacher and learner to share the *same* understanding of the task. Many factors contribute to the 'communicative process' (Mercer, 1994, p. 84) which creates this shared understanding. The linguistic skills of the teacher as communicator, and the discursive skills of the learner in questioning and reasoning are explicit within the task context. The structural positions of the co-participants in relation to power, the impact of pupil learning identities and the tensions between teaching and assessing are implicit. Procrastinating behaviours in response to assigned tasks are interpreted as part of the communicative process within that context.

The aim to share the same understanding of a task rests on the willingness of participants to expose their existing level of understanding, through conversation and discourse. The bridge between curriculum learning and 'understanding in practice' (Lave, 1988) is often wide. In school settings literate and decontextualised learning are traditionally valued and reproduced, with reduced opportunities for 'understanding in practice'. Lave writes

..formal knowledge structures in practice(...) are transformed from standardised forms into situationally specific realisations in practice...

Lave 1988 : 124

This 'understanding in practice' through transformation becomes central to learning, mediated through discourse. Each constructs his or her own meaning, then reconstructs that meaning in relation to others' meaning. Exposing understanding, adjusting one's own understanding, demands a willingness on behalf of co-participants and a degree of fluency so that interconnections are seamlessly made. Modes of thought, discourse and activity mutually constitute this understanding. When these modes are fragmented, as in the disruption of procrastinating behaviours, I believe this leads to discontinuity across contexts.

*What may constrain learners from engaging in learning conversations?*

a. Children may not access from their repertoire the appropriate linguistic skills and mode of thinking demanded by the task. They then use what Lave (1988) calls 'everyday thinking' (p.77). In decontextualised, abstract learning which may be the focus of curriculum-driven assigned tasks, learners' efforts to fill gaps in understanding may be dependent upon the support available to them in the situation. Without a willingness to expose existing understanding, this support may be inappropriate. Understanding in practice is achieved through the discursive and dialectic nature of social interactions, which may or may not be in the child's repertoire. Bruner (1996) considers the scope of these interactions and their role in 'filling the gaps';

...human beings deliberately teach each other in settings outside the ones in which the knowledge being taught will be used. ....It is customary to say this specialization rests upon the gift of language. .... it also rests upon our astonishingly well developed talent for "intersubjectivity" - the human ability to understand the minds of others, whether through language, gesture, or other means. It is not just words that make this possible, but our capacity to grasp the role of the settings in which words, acts and gestures occur. ....It is this which permits us to "negotiate" meanings when words go astray.

Bruner 1996 : 20

I propose that procrastinating behaviours may have much to do with understanding and 'words that go astray'. For children to learn through the community experience, they need to initiate activity, exposing their thoughts in order to achieve intersubjectivity with others, reflecting and recognising change in their understanding . Bruner emphasises the role of discourse in achieving this:

the child is thought of as holding more or less coherent "theories" not only about the world but about her own mind and how it works. These naive theories are brought

into congruence with those of parents and teachers not through imitation, not through didactic instruction but by discourse, collaboration and negotiation.

Bruner 1996 : 57

I wish to understand what intuitive theories these children hold, and how these came about. I would add to Bruner's (1996) thoughts that non-verbal communication is also a constituent of the learning situation and feeds into the child's expectation of learning, influencing his or her approach to achieving 'congruence'. I agree with Rogoff (1989 p.73) that non-verbal communication is important in 'bridging', which is part of 'guided participation', for it provides emotional cues and non-verbal interpretations of behaviour. Procrastinating behaviours may originate in efforts to 'fill the gaps' between everyday and abstract learning. Equally they may have much to do with linguistics, 'words that go astray', (Bruner 1996, p.20) and interpreting the significance of the setting in which the task is communicated.

b. Children do not share the benefit of an overview of what is to be learnt. Each task and group of learners has a history, and teachers begin to construct a common knowledge by recourse to that history. Bennett (1994) points out that the teacher has a view of the overall purpose and where it fits into the curricular sequence, but this is often unknown to the children. The teacher's task is to locate this for the child. The task should be presented on an understanding of where it fits with the previous learning, what will be achieved during the present task, and where it will lead. The language used to create this collective memory (Bartlett, 1932, cited by Bennett, 1994) may be imposed by the teacher, in the interests of furthering learning, but may not be understood by all the participants. Bruner warns,

(language used).....often imposes a perspective that establishes a teacher's 'stance' which is off-putting and barrenly informative.

Bruner 1986 : 26

Bennett et al. (1984) found that teachers' preamble to tasks tended to stress procedural rather than cognitive aims of a task (p.100). I suggest that where

this is the case, it is in part due to preoccupation with achieving an outcome rather than engaging in a process, due to demands for accountability and target setting. Concerned with moving the task on, the teacher constructs a collective memory by selective encouragement of learner's contributions. It is easy to accept the assent of a few as the view of all. A child who procrastinates is unlikely to have a voice heard, and must accept the version as created by others, or reject it. Teachers also have a temporal agenda which the learners do not share. Hajnicz (1998) sums this up:

A teacher will formulate his reasons with the help of general concepts, fitting them into his system of priorities for tasks. With a child it is different, he formulates his reasons on a plane of concrete items where there is not yet a definite system of priorities for aims.

Hajnicz 1998 : 203

A social constructivist approach has potential to overcome any lack of experience in prioritising. The teacher and co-participants create organisation in the action of their mutually constructed discourse. Prioritising is modelled as part of the construction of learning. The children I focus upon appeared to have a developing sense of prioritising, but did not have the benefit of the wider overview of what was to be learned. What Hajnicz (1998) has to say, could offer one interpretation of procrastinating behaviours. However, as not all learners repeatedly procrastinate and some learners *procrastinate only in some situations*, it would seem that an inability to prioritise alone, is an inadequate interpretation.

### c. Children need to interpret implicit ground rules.

Edwards and Mercer (1987) brought attention to the need for interpreting educational ground rules in the process of reaching 'common knowledge, which provides a contextual basis for further educational activity' (Mercer 1994, p.90). Educational ground rules are the implicit expectations and norms of the classroom culture, which are interpreted and created by the participants and the teacher in interaction. Because they frequently remain implicit and open to interpretation, it is possible that procrastinating



behaviours derive from the uncertainty and ambiguity inherent in task presentations. The understanding which we aim to share in task settings is transitory, for inferring what is in another's mind can never be achieved with certainty, and the state of existing knowledge is continually changing in response to sociocultural experiences. For the children who procrastinate, interpretation of those ground rules may lead them to prevaricate until such time as they are more assured or released from the pressures to respond.

The protecting ethos which is prevalent in many infant classrooms is based on the assumption that children should avoid failure. Although well intentioned, the efforts to address a task to children of mixed competencies, or to address differing tasks to individuals, frequently lead to ambiguity and the learner may be confused as to the manner in which he or she should proceed. Daniel, described in the data analysis, procrastinated for the duration of the task, Chapter 4 (22), and avoided failure in the face of ambiguity.

*d.* Children may feel alone and isolated in their efforts to make sense.

The teacher relies upon assumed understanding until such time as it becomes apparent that the gap between teacher and learner understanding needs to be bridged. Bridging the gap contingently is an essential feature of Rogoff's (1993) 'guided participation'. Children fill the gap with naive theories (Bruner 1996, p.57) which are founded on past experiences and the ensuing situation and may feed into future strategic behaviours. This activity denotes the child's efforts to make the same sense of the situation as the more experienced person portrays it. The two are interdependent, and in the classroom, it is possible that the child is alone, trying to make sense. This may arise from constraints on the teachers' time, out of the learner's choice because the cognitive leap from existing to new knowledge is too great, or because the learner sees no alternative in his or her strategic repertoire. As Bennett and Dunne (1992) point out,

...if cognitive demand is too hard, or children do not have enough background experience and knowledge to discuss or answer questions, then it is likely that the co-operative element will disintegrate.

Bennett and Dunne 1992 : 108

This is supported by Rogoff (1999),

The difficulty of communicating some ideas or of negotiating mental responsibility in social groups may lead individuals to prefer to work alone. This preference may be based on expectations of greater effectiveness of individual effort, but it may also involve concern about the effort or risk of collaborative work - even though the collaboration may be more effective than the individual work.

Rogoff 1999 : 75

Incidences of children expressing a preference to work alone have certainly arisen in my observations of Daniel and Andrew (Chapter 4 (2) (4)). A child on the outside of common knowledge, with the additional task of interpreting the educational ground rules implicit in the ever changing situations of classroom learning, has much to contend with.

#### **v. Socio-cultural influences upon procrastinating behaviours**

##### **Learning identities.**

Pollard and Filer (1996, 1999) in looking at pupil careers over a seven year period suggest identities are negotiated through three principal components:

*patterns of outcomes*, related to the learning and social contexts of successive classrooms, together with those of the wider school and playground;

*patterns of strategic action* developed in coping with, and acting within, these contexts;

the *evolving sense of self* which pupils bring to, and derive from, school settings and external contexts.

Pollard and Filer 1999 : 25

Whilst this present study does not have the benefit of reflection over such an extended period of time, or of experiences outside the classroom, the components identified by Pollard and Filer (1999) are highly pertinent to understanding learning identities which may be expressed through procrastinating behaviours. I consider learning identities in the context of the learning situation, personal control and status.

*Learning identities in relation to the learning context.*

The inter-relatedness of learning identity and the social experience of learning is summed up by Mead (1934):

What determines the amount of self that gets into  
communication is the social experience itself.

Mead 1934:142

Children may procrastinate because of the learning identity they hold, equally their learning identity may emerge from the responses to those behaviours. Individuals respond in strategically differing ways across contexts This is reflected in the data collected and typology of behaviours described in Chapter 4. Such differing responses seem to indicate self awareness and the ability to make strategic choices. Those choices are recursively influenced by learning identity. The learners' beliefs about themselves, about how they are perceived by their teachers, and their peers, together with their meta-beliefs about how the peers and teacher perceive that they perceive themselves, feed into attitude and learning identity. Mumby and Stohl (1991) summarise this,

.....individual subjectivity, or identity, is constructed  
through its enmeshment in social and communicative  
practices.

Mumby and Stohl 1991:316

This identity promotes or constrains participation and in part is created in the act of participation. Pollard and Filer (1999) illustrate how children draw on identity and status to develop a strategic biography through which they make choices. Sarah (p.291) is 'characterized in terms of adaptation' where William is 'described in terms of negotiation and challenge'.

..where the rewards and status he sought were not forthcoming, positive challenge could degenerate into opposition , withdrawal of co-operation and conflictual relations with peers.

Pollard and Filer 1999:291

These illustrations bear similarities with Joe and Andrew in my own study. Luke and Daniel, in my study are reflected in Robert who,

...was able to develop adaptive strategies which allowed him to pursue his own interests at the same time as maintaining a satisfactory identity and classroom status in the eyes of teachers and peers.

Pollard and Filer 1999:291

The strategies they employ are in response to the context of the task.

Biggs (1990) draws attention to the fact that it is not only the formal situations in which tasks are presented which communicate the context, but also the informal. The relationships formed through informal interactions communicate expectations and nurture task approaches. Biggs (1990) writes that if a child is feeling anxiety within the learning context, the learning approach he or she adopts will result in surface learning. The evidence in this present study suggests that this is so. However the anxiety is expressed in different ways in terms of my typology described in Chapter 4. Gary's behaviour appeared less adaptive than the other children's whose responses ranged across the typology. Augstein and Thomas (1991) talk of 'task-bound' behaviour (p.86) where children appeared locked in their personal myths and their search for personal meaning was restricted,

If a person's myth of themselves as learner is based on the view that learning comes from teaching, then their view of the learning process will imply an asymmetric conversation in which the control of the process lies outside. They are thus other-organised. As they begin to realise that the conversational process of learning need not involve a teacher, that it can become symmetrical and that they can participate fully in controlling the

process of learning, they become self-organised. this means they accept the need for responsibility to evaluate their own learning.

Augstein and Thomas 1991:88

This supports what I found in my study and what I would wish for the learners who display procrastinating behaviours. Their action is sited in a context which is rule bound and they are immersed in a community of implicit and explicit values. Bruner (1985) describes the interpretative process by which this comes about:

.....aspirant members of a culture learn from their tutors, the vicars of their cultures, how to understand the world. That world is a symbolic world in the sense that it consists of conceptually organised, rule-bound belief systems about what exists, about how to get goals, about what it is to be valued.

Bruner 1985:32

The interpretation of this symbolic world cannot be determined with certainty, but is ever changing. Within this world, children negotiate their learning identities.

#### *Learning identities in relation to personal control.*

In the symbolic interactionist paradigm, Mead (1934, 1962 edition) showed how the individual comes to know him or herself as a learner, in relation to the teacher, and in relation to peers.

For the individual organism is obviously an essential and *important fact or constituent element of the empirical situation in which it acts*; and without taking objective account of itself as such, it cannot act rationally. The individual experiences himself as such, not directly, but only indirectly, from the particular standpoints of other individual members of the social group or from the generalized standpoint of the social group as a whole to which he belongs.

Mead 1934:138

The interpretative processes in learning situations, overshadowed by preoccupation with structure and organisation in Piaget's theory, are acknowledged by Mead (1934), Lave (1988) and Lave and Wenger (1991). In Piagetian theory the individual took control of learning. In situated cognitivist theory, becoming and acting as a member of a community, implies community control through self regulation. Mead (1934) drew attention to the role of personal control in social learning,

.....the complex co-operative processes and activities and institutional functionings of organised human society are also only possible in so far as every individual involved in them or belonging to that society can take the general attitudes of all the other such individuals with reference to these processes and activities and institutional functionings, and to the organised social whole of experiential relations and interactions thereby constituted - and can direct his own behaviour accordingly.

Mead 1934:155

Procrastinating behaviours leave open the possibility that the learner may relinquish conscious control of learning, and this may militate against co-operative activities within the classroom community. The learner may become reliant upon the teacher's control and in so doing, his or her motivation to search for personal meaning may be channelled solely to the procrastinating behaviours.

#### *Learning identities in relation to personal status.*

In situated learning the learner is motivated to become part of a community of practitioners on the basis of his or her past and present experiences, and 'the growing use value of participation' (Lave and Wenger, 1991:122). These, combined with social and cultural influences, feed into the dynamic development of a learning identity. Lave and Wenger (1991) write:

Knowing is inherent in the growth and transformation of identities and it is located in relations among practitioners, their practice, the artefacts of their practice, social organisation and political economy of communities of practice.

Lave and Wenger 1991:122

Procrastinating behaviours have much to do with status in the learning community. Identities may be maintained, confined or promoted according to the mutually constitutive learning situation. Lave and Wenger (1991) write of the 'multiple relations through which persons define themselves in practice.' (p.53 - 4), and that 'learning and a sense of identity are inseparable: they are aspects of the same phenomenon.' (Lave and Wenger 1991:115).

Reflecting the symbolic interactionist paradigm, Pollard (1985) suggests that 'primary interests-at-hand' for both the teacher and the learner concern the status of the self. In this regard teacher and learner have similar interests, although learners are more likely to be concerned with a dual aspect of their status. I have evidence of what Pollard and Filer (1999) describe as the curriculum demands balanced against their status in the eyes of their peers,

..peer status can be threatened by conformity to academic expectations and pupil identity then becomes a product of management of contradictory cultural forces.

Pollard and Filer 1999 : 23

Status arises from what is communicated as valued by significant others, and motivation may be a product of this, manifest in persistence, effort and attention. On the other hand, self concept measured against values which are incompatible with an individual may lead to withdrawal (Gary) or conflict (Andrew). Self-esteem in terms of cognitive achievement is related to the attributions assigned to effort and ability. The teacher plays a role in the formation of these attribution tendencies in the use of praise and feedback during or following a task. If a child is discouraged by past experiences, a low self-image may deter him or her from risking being

drawn in to further experiences which are likely to reinforce this self-image. In this view, procrastinating behaviours may be interpreted as a coping strategy (Pollard, 1982, 1985) .

Learning identities influence the strategic choices children make in response to assigned tasks. Those choices are based on what is communicated in previous learning experiences, which in turn determines future participation. They are themselves subjective interpretations of what is perceived as valued and worthwhile; what is understood in terms of expectations; or the means to preserve status in the eyes of peers, teachers or self. Procrastinating behaviours may be reduced if teachers' evaluative role is shared with the learner, so that they **share control** and come to know **self- efficacy**.

### **The balance of power surrounding procrastinating behaviours.**

#### *Maintaining a 'working consensus'.*

The children in this study are clear when they talk about decision-making in the classroom. They tell me that I tell them when they work and when they play, when they have done enough work. From the child's perspective, this may well be confirmation of a message inculcated at home. The explicit vestiges of power such as commanding attention of a large group of children simultaneously, deciding what should be learned, at what time and for how long, are organisational features which become part of the classroom culture. More tacit features of teacher power tend to resist challenge and become part of the ground rules to be interpreted by the learners.

Pollard (1982) names the accommodation of both teacher and learner interests the 'working consensus';

...a type of negotiated 'truce' between the teacher and the children, by which each recognises the coping necessities of the other. It is a socially constructed set of understandings which reduces threat and enables the participants mutually to accomplish the social situation in their classroom.



In the interests of a class group of young learners, the teacher has responsibility for the maintenance of control and takes a greater share of the power. If I view control as power I hold over the learners in my charge, then procrastinating behaviours must be interpreted as a challenge to that power. I intuitively feel the need to prompt the child into action to conform with my intention and expectation. I feel the need to control the activity of some children more closely than others, because of the assumptions I make about them. If on the other hand I view control as power I wish ultimately to hand to the learner to be used to promote his or her learning, then my perspective of procrastinating behaviours changes. The learner will not intuitively know how to exercise that power, but through participation in explicit discourse the learner will come to see how to utilise the power in relationship with others, not against them. Power can be passed back and forth and need not become the sole prerogative of one or the other. The alternatives are not so simply defined in practice, and the two perspectives confusingly interweave.

Power is manifest in the exercise of control. Control is present in questioning which serves social, managerial and cognitive purposes and may do so simultaneously. It is a device borne of the need to manage a number of individuals for the common benefit of all, whilst empowering them to become reflective, self-regulating learners.

*Power implicit in questioning.*

When it is in its social guise used by learners, questioning becomes a tool to achieve a sense of control and self efficacy. Power is created in the act of learning and in the dynamic processes undergoes change. It facilitates the meaning making within a group through the dialectical roles adopted by individuals. The children in this study have a tendency not to initiate questions, but to wait to be questioned or evade questioning. They undoubtedly take cues from others, but these may be misinterpreted by the learners and the control of their learning relinquished. In the data analysis, I

have evidence of the social control exerted by and upon the learners who procrastinate.

Implicit control achieved through questioning feeds into learning identities and over time may dispose a learner to procrastinate because of ambiguity in expectation and interpretation. The questions may not originate solely from the teacher in the learning situation, but may equally come from peers viewed as significant others. When questions are generated by the learners themselves, it is the audience response to those questions which is vital, where that response fits in relation to what has come before and what is to follow. Who judges the responses and on what grounds? Carlsen (1991) provides a review of studies which have explored the context and content of questions and the reactions that students and teachers have to them. What is relevant to this study from those findings is that 'the communicative performance of a student is contingent upon the actions of other speakers and cannot be assessed in isolation from others.' (p.159). Procrastinating behaviours cannot be interpreted as stemming from individual communicative performance, for each one in the community of learners is responsible for what occurs. The teachers' task is to think in terms of local objectives, such as how to engage the learner, and these can only be effective with knowledge of his or her interests, aptitudes and learning styles, discovered through observation and questioning.

The managerial function of questioning is apparent in classroom conversations in assigned tasks. These are unlike everyday or playground conversations for they are governed by the ground rules and working consensus. It is usual that the teacher has the right to choose the topic of conversation, to take first turn at talking, and to nominate turn-taking. In addition, the teacher exercises choice as to who to nominate in the interest either of constructing a common knowledge, or of moving the task along. Conversely, the teacher may also choose who is to be ignored in constructing that common knowledge and how long individuals are allowed to respond before the responsibility is taken away from them. The opportunity to demonstrate understanding may be curtailed by the nature of

the questions, or the questioner may not genuinely listen to the response because the answer is already known. The children who procrastinate may not be moved along through questioning, at the same rate as their peers. Equally, in procrastinating they may manage their participation, effecting a control that is self-interested, and not task orientated.

Questioning serves a cognitive function to understand and assess. Both questioning and listening are integral parts of assessment. Formative assessment in the course of activity is in keeping with a constructivist rationale, and lends opportunity to know a child's existing understanding in order to plan for future learning. Questioning allows the teacher and learner to move intuitive sense to an educated sense, exploring what is commonly known and taking the child beyond, to his or her *zone of proximal development*. Learners, in questioning, see the role they play in effecting change in their own thinking, expose thought and move making intuitive sense to making educated sense.

Formative assessment necessarily involves a process of thinking out loud, formulating thoughts, and talking through ideas. The teacher's role is to structure this with the learner through questioning, reflecting and suggesting. It takes place between partners or groups and may be the site for display of procrastinating behaviours. The structure of questions, whether open, closed, leading or pseudo, clear or confused, narrow or discursive will influence the effectiveness of the intentional teaching and learning. Engaging in interaction involves judgements of what is relevant, giving voice to interpretations, grappling with cognitive conflict as new ideas are exposed, all of which accentuate the vulnerability of the learner. Yet at the same time it is through these processes that the learner comes to understand the task. To reap this benefit, there has to be a readiness to risk exposing existing understanding. Procrastinating behaviours impede that readiness.

The course of assessment will reflect the demands of the task, but the formative assessment I focus upon here is that of the learning conversation. Torrance and Pryor (1998) confirm what I find in practice,

Extensive reflection on the detailed progress of each individual was not considered feasible - there are just too many children in the classroom....

.....only focusing on individuals in detail if they are causing real concern

Torrance and Pryor 1998 : 34- 35

This practice devised to cope with the reality of the classroom is fraught with implications for the children who exhibit procrastinating behaviours. Because of my concern for their progress, I differentiate my approach to them, which in turn relays messages about my expectations of them. This implies a static view of learning that is curriculum driven, and likely to lead the learners to believe they are exempt from the criteria which have been set. Bennett et al. (1984) found that a teacher's

...high level of differentiation was produced almost entirely by drastically narrowing the curriculum for the low attainers.

Bennett et al 1984 : 96

This has parallels with Minick's (1996) work on teachers' 'representational language' which also reflects teacher expectations. He shows how teachers redefine '*non-representational utterances*' to become '*representational directives*' which

...appear to be driven by the teacher's efforts to maintain strict control over their pupil's activities in order to maximise effectiveness or efficiency of classroom activity.

Minick 1996:358

In my experience this strategy is familiar in encouraging participation 'on site'. In Gary's task (19) referred to above, in order to encourage participation, I progressively narrowed his role in the task, altering the nature of the task. Children are expected to act upon the literal interpretation of the directives without recourse to situational sense.

Situated learning is premised on dialectical skills, however Chaiklin and Lave (1996) warn against siting meaning-making solely in language, in its literal sense,

One of the ironies of doing this is that the very act of attempting to turn language into the only site of meaning creates at one and the same time ambiguities of meaning and a basis for controlling learners.

Chaiklin and Lave 1993:25

This strategy precludes the interpretative avenues children may take in making sense, and effectively guides the learner along the teacher's intended path. Teachers' shifts from nondirectional speech where situational sense contributes to the meaning, to representational speech, may cause anxiety and uncertainty as well as dependency upon the teachers' meaning.

Questioning has an evaluative function which may be transformed to motivate through praise and reward in feedback. In using rewards McDermott (1996) warns, 'All parts of the system define all other parts.' As rewards are awarded, so failures are defined. Children may hold self-restricting views of themselves which may derive from their experiences as learners, influenced by the values implicit in a reward system. Rowe (1994) suggests that when children are taught, rewards are given from the adult perspective. This is echoed by Wearmouth (1997) who writes

Teaching styles reflect a profound, personal belief in a particular model of the human being, and are adapted to conform to this belief.

Wearmouth 1997 :123

In my practice I try to elicit the child's perception of their performance in a task, but the mere fact that I have solicited their view is open to interpretation and on occasions children will not be drawn to give an opinion. Hanko (1994) warns,

Praise will not work if perceived by the pupil as insincere. It may lead children into praise dependent, even praise hungry conformity, .....

Hanko 1994 : 166

The attention brought by praise may be unwelcome to the child who has not reached understanding of the task in focus. In the interests of self preservation, he or she may use power to protect himself or herself and this may be manifest in silence or withholding an opinion. To successfully employ the strategies of micro politics the child requires an assessment of the teacher in terms of the responses such behaviours are likely to generate. Equally, the teacher must know the child. To return this to the context of learning, Rogoff (1989) reminds,

children participate by indicating their readiness for greater responsibility or even by managing the transfer of information.

Rogoff 1989 : 81

It is the change from procrastinator to manager which is the ultimate goal for those who use procrastinating behaviours. Without co-operation and feedback from the learner, learning is reduced to a static process of delivering information. Both teacher and learner have roles to play in making judgements which have power implications for both. The quest is to use that power for the mutual good of all participants in the learning process. We can only know what the child chooses to let us see, and our actions define that choice.

Procrastinators challenge the mutual and joint action of teacher and learner. The interpretative nature of interactions must not be forgotten, and with this the possibility that judgements are made on partial understanding, both on the part of teacher and learner. Procrastinating behaviours do not have their origin solely within the child, or the setting, but in the complexity of the situation in which potential learning is seated.

## **vi. Summary.**

### **Summary in relation to the research questions.**

I reflect upon my research questions with reference to the literature which relates to the phenomena surrounding procrastinating behaviours.

- What possible interpretations of procrastinating behaviours are offered by social constructivist theories of learning and research studies to date?

In the Piagetian paradigm, these behaviours would be interpreted as indicators of developmental stages. Learning, seen as an individual acquisition, awaits a stage of logical and linguistic readiness. If procrastinating behaviours were interpreted according to this theoretical perspective, the potential for discourse to challenge existing learning would not be realised. In the Vygotskian theory of learning, interpretation of such behaviours would lead to revision of the support offered. This would be based on the assessment of existing learning, and the steps necessary to challenge the individual beyond this to potential learning. The language would be structured in keeping with the task, contingent upon the child's understanding. The potential of social discourse for the development of discursive skills and the metaskills which indicate learning would not be recognised. Procrastinating behaviours would be interpreted as sited in the dyadic learning situation, between the two participants. In symbolic interactionist theories of learning, interpretation of these behaviours would rest on the learner's affective state and concept of self as mediator in learning. Situated learning holds the greatest challenge to procrastinating behaviours, for it has the potential to share power and mutual responsibility for learning between co-participants. As such, it holds the potential both for reducing those behaviours, and increasing the opportunities to learn from the culture inherent in group settings.

Collaboration in group activity draws the child into goal related discourse in practice. This in turn becomes a test bed for discursive skills which bring about reasoning. In situated learning procrastinating behaviours are seen as part of learning, and part of the learning situation. Theoretically the

behaviours can be used positively to change apparently passive behaviour to active construction of meaning. Analysis of the data in Chapter 4 shows that translating theory into practice is not unproblematic.

- In individual and group assigned tasks, what are the possible links between communication and procrastinating behaviours?

Implicit in individual tasks is the expectation that the outcome should be a reflection of individual effort, and as such communication is restricted. Seeking communication by implication detracts from the individual efforts of others and may be avoided in procrastinating behaviours. Group assigned tasks offer wider possibilities for discourse but require strategic and social skills. This applies not only to the children who procrastinate but also to those participating in the task who share responsibility.

From the teacher perspective assigned tasks need to be both individual and group, and the teaching style determined by the nature of the intended learning. Direct instruction of hierarchical knowledge following a well-defined set of procedures will produce a predictable outcome. Multidirectional tasks involving interpretative conversations are less predictable and the role of the learner less defined. The role of the teacher in assigning tasks is to ensure that the task purpose, nature, resources and learners' skills are in harmony. Bennett et al.'s 1984 study found that often learners interpret tasks in ways which do not promote the teacher-intended learning, and this present study confirms that. Alexander et al. (1995) found that children spent more time on tasks which involved talking, than reading and writing. My data show that procrastinating behaviours endure when children perceive individual effort for individual outcome is required. On the other hand, talking does not guarantee access to the task as shown in Chapter 4 (7) (18). I also show that co-operative groupings which ideally provide the arena for questioning and reasoning, demand skill of the teacher in organisation and of the pupils in participating.



Creating the same shared understanding of a task can be problematical for children unwilling or unable to engage in that task. This may be due to linguistic or conceptual difficulties (Bennett and Dunne, 1992, Rogoff, 1999), a lack of understanding of the mode of thought required (Bartlett 1958 cited by Lave, 1988), or failure to see where the task fits into the overall picture of what is to be learnt (Hajnicz, 1998). The ground rules for participation established in the class community may be threateningly open to interpretation (Edwards and Mercer, 1987) and the child may feel alone and unsupported in his or her efforts to make sense. Communication has the potential to bridge these gaps for the children who procrastinate, yet communication is dependent upon interpretations shared between co-participants. In analysis of the data, I show that in practice reluctance to share interpretations of what is communicated blocks further communication (Andrew (21)).

- What influence do individuals' learning identities have in determining co-participation towards shared purposes?

Learning identities determine both present and future engagement in tasks. Individuals' differential responses across contexts indicate self-awareness and the ability to make strategic choices. Mead (1934) wrote of the importance of learners being able to see themselves as group members and as others see them. Bruner (1985) recognised the efforts needed in interpreting the symbolic world in which learning takes place. Those efforts and responses to those efforts feed into the learning identity which encapsulates status. Lave and Wenger (1991) add that status is vital to all participants in the learning situation. Pollard and Filer (1996, 1999) extend that sense of status to the teacher as learner and in so doing emphasises the inter-relationships which have the potential to promote or reduce procrastinating behaviours. In the data analysis I show how some children are willing and able to declare their learning identities, where others guard them.

- In the recursive sequence of teaching, learning and assessment, what role does the distribution of power play in the incidence of procrastinating behaviours?

Structural positions of teacher and learner are potent factors in the incidence of procrastination. Pollard (1982) drew attention to the need for teachers and learners to negotiate a sense of power. This usually occurs in the everyday programmes of the classroom and is negotiated through mutual activity, often left implicit, but is rarely an agreed share. Power may be viewed as control over learners, in which view procrastinating behaviours would challenge this power. Alternatively it may be seen as a path to self - efficacy for the mutual benefit of all learners (Rogoff 1989). Power is manifest in questioning strategies, in praise and reward (Hanko 1994, Rowe 1994, Mc Dermott 1996). In assessment, power inherent in questioning is used to move learning on, yet it can also be used restrictively (Minick, 1996) eliciting responses from a narrow repertoire in order to meet teacher expectation or assessment criteria. Paradoxically, it is this potentially restricting questioning which procrastinating learners are frequently exposed to in order to elicit responses, so perpetuating the circle of procrastination. I draw on examples of this in the data analysis, Chapter 4.

### **The main issues arising from the literature.**

This study is premised upon a **social constructivist view of learning** which promotes community learning and values collaborative effort through discourse. It is set against a perceived need to promote individual learning for individual achievement. The translation of theory into practice is problematical and the reality demands a repertoire of flexible strategies which empower children to become self regulated learners. In the data analysis, I interpret the procrastinating behaviours in a 'scaffolded' setting (Luke Chapter 4 (1)) asking whether this perspective helps me to understand the behaviours. I examine the **organisation and management** of tasks, to suggest what might give rise to the behaviours. I move from the teacher perspective to the interactions between teacher and learner. I turn

to **creating common shared understanding**, for I propose that failure to achieve intersubjectivity for these learners leads to procrastinating behaviours. I next look at the communicative process at work between teacher and learner and learners and peers, with a view to suggesting what might reduce those behaviours. Finally, I consider what is implicit in the learning situation which may promote, or maintain these behaviours or cause them to re-occur. The issues here are **pupil learning identities, the use of power and assessment**.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY.**

### **i. An ethnographic case study approach.**

Cohen and Manion (1994) write of ethnomethodology, that it

is concerned with how people make sense of their everyday world. More especially, it is directed at the mechanisms by which participants achieve and sustain interaction in a social encounter - the assumptions they make, the conventions they utilize, and the practices they adopt.

Cohen and Manion 1994:31

Such an approach is in keeping with the social constructivist theoretical and social interactionist conceptual frameworks of this study. It 'allows me to explore the potential for linking social interactionism and social constructivism' (Pollard 1990, p. 247) which underpin the themes of this study, theories of learning and the communicative process. In addition it has the potential to capture the fine detail of adaptive strategies associated with procrastinating behaviour, in the dynamic setting of the classroom. In this study I focus upon five children as case studies. Cohen and Manion (1994) write:

.....the case study researcher typically observes the characteristics of an individual unit - a child, a clique, a class, a school or a community. The purpose of such observation is to probe deeply and to analyse intensively the multifarious phenomena that constitute the life cycle of the unit with a view to establishing generalisations about the wider population to which that unit belongs.

Cohen and Manion 1994:106-7

I make participant observations, supplemented by semi-structured and unstructured interviews. These are progressively analysed to help me understand what gives rise to the procrastinating behaviours and how teachers and learners may jointly reduce them, and to suggest strategies that may replace them.

## Why ethnography?

Research known to me, relevant to procrastinating behaviours in primary aged children, has in the main been based on the scientific paradigm, proposing theories that may be tested by experimentation or the application of standardised procedures, and making claims in relation to an initial hypothesis. Dweck (1986), Dweck and Reppucci (1973), for example, attribute behaviours which bear similarity with procrastinating behaviours to 'within child' causes, categorising them as 'learned helplessness' or 'preserving self worth'. The scientific experimental paradigm is based on the principle of 'normative behaviours' which are rule governed, and therefore may be manipulated. However, I strive to reflect the reality of the situations I observe as they unfold, without disruption to the participants. A positivist approach would not serve to answer my research questions which are interpretive and subjective in nature. It would be inconsistent with my social constructivist view of learning. In addition, the language of scientific paradigm studies makes the information less accessible to teacher practitioner audiences. Ethnography offers accessible information, whilst complementing research conducted in the scientific paradigm.

I believe ethnographic case study offers an appropriate methodology to address my research questions, collect and analyse data, because

- It allows critical examination of my existing theoretical stance, values, assumptions, expectations and practices

Rudestam and Newton, (1992) point out that

Because the (qualitative) researcher is regarded as a person who comes to the scene with his or her operative reality, rather than as a totally detached scientific observer, it becomes vital to understand, acknowledge, and share one's own underlying values, assumptions and expectations.

Rudestam and Newton 1992: 38

In the course of this study, my claims to social constructivist practices have been challenged in that I have found my practice to be more pluralist than I believed. The experience has shown me that effective scaffolding of

learning occurs less frequently than I assumed; that interpretations children place upon what is communicated in assigned tasks are rooted in implicit ground rules of the classroom culture. The methodology I used allowed me insights into these otherwise hidden phenomena.

- It uses and develops background professional experience particularly as observer and listener

Cohen and Manion (1994) write

The purpose of such observation is to probe deeply and to analyse intensively the multifarious phenomena that constitute the life cycle of the unit with a view to establishing generalisations about the wider population to which that unit belongs.

Cohen and Manion 1994:106 - 107

Manke (1997) adds to this,

To understand the sources and consequences of observed actions is to have the potential either to change them or to respond differently to them.

Manke 1997:132

In my experience my skills of observation continue to develop through engaging in this study and this, for me, has been an important professional development. I, and colleagues who have been involved in the learning situations, have come to realise the value status of observations as a valid classroom activity, especially when children are involved in whole class teaching and additional adults are not directly involved with the children.

- It reflects the traditions and cultures of the classroom

Ethnography focuses on the collection of detail which is probed to reach an understanding of the phenomena studied. At the outset of this study, the relevance of tradition and culture was not apparent to me, but has emerged through the course of data collection and analysis. Positivist research is concerned with taking 'snapshots in time', and focusing on isolated events. To adopt such an approach would be to deny the richness of the interactive context, which constitutes traditions and cultures of the classroom.

- It seeks alternative perspectives to interpret the data

It was essential to my research to approach the problem as I saw it, through the perspectives of the child and the teacher. The essence of learning in my view is the striving for intersubjectivity. The action of seeking to understand and reflect upon practice is professional learning (Stenhouse, 1983). To understand the procrastinating behaviours, I needed to understand the perspectives on learning taken by both the learners and myself. In addition, alternative perspectives on observations and interpretation of what is said in interview, serve to strengthen the data analysis and in turn lend credence to the findings.

- It exposes the relationships between the beliefs and practices of both teacher and learner

The mutual constitution of beliefs and expectations within the classroom culture has become evident. This reflects the situated cognitivists' stance on learning (Lave, 1988, 1992, Lave and Wenger, 1991, Chaiklin and Lave, 1996, Rogoff, 1989, 1990, 1993, 1999) which I share. It has been particularly salient to the issue of power and control reported in the literature review (Chapter 2) and evidenced in the data analysis (Chapter 4). Joe and Daniel in a post-task interview (12) believed that I had asked them to write where I had asked them to discuss. This was confirmed by an adult present. The children's perception was that writing was required, against which I would judge their effort, a perception that had been fostered in the classroom cultures and values. Had I adopted a positivist approach to the research, this information which enlightens my observations would not have been available.

- It looks at phenomena at different stages in their 'life cycle' (Schofield, 1993, p.104, Cohen and Manion, 1994, pp. 106-7)

The opportunity to follow the children through two years of curriculum learning, as they grew from six years to seven, allowed me to discern patterns in individuals' behaviours as they developed in response to changing situations and personal developments. Daniel, for example, at the outset of the study physically withdrew from situations, yet at the end of the

period of data collection he managed his participation in tasks to meet his own ends. The prolonged involvement with the children allowed me to follow unanticipated phenomena and reflect upon them as they developed.

### **Methodological issues in relation to this research.**

The first issue is concerned with my role as teacher researcher.

Walford (1991) cites Lofland (1971) who wrote with reference to analysing social settings,

Being a known observer allows one to get close to some people's worlds. It can then become quite evident to the observer that although he is 'in' that world, he is not 'of' it..... Marginality stimulates the actual 'seeing' of the setting and its aspects as problematic topics.

Lofland 1971 cited in Walford 1991: 97

I maintain that the infant classroom is a special, dynamic social setting and my position within that is privileged. I feel that, in keeping with my social cognitivist stance, I *was* 'in and of' the situation I was observing. The marginality Lofland (1971) described had to be consciously evoked. This was difficult, but in suspending my perceptions and trying to understand situations from the child's view, a sense of marginality was achieved. The challenge to my self esteem through introspection cannot be denied.

Hammersley (1993) argues that 'insider researchers' have little advantage over 'outsider researchers' He writes that teacher researchers

have access to their own intentions and motives.....will usually have long-term experience of the setting being studied.....already (have) relationships with others in the setting ...are in a position to test theoretical ideas.....

Hammersley 1993:218

He counters this by suggesting that

People can be wrong about their own intentions and motives;.....An outsider researcher may be able to tap a wider range of sources of information than an insider.....Relationships may place constraints on the



inquiry that an outside researcher may be able to avoid....What is required to test theoretical ideas may well conflict with what is needed for good practice.

Hammersley 1993:218-9

In my view Hammersley (1993) overlooks the self-motivated drive to understand phenomena which impels the necessary examination of values, assumptions and expectations. However, his argument that relationships available to the practitioner may not include what is necessary for research purposes (p.219) is in part applicable to this study. By virtue of my role as teacher researcher the types of task I observed, though planned to meet individual learning, were constrained by the level of involvement I could offer in terms of maintaining discourse. Keeping observations simultaneously with inspiring excitement and challenge was more problematical than observing a more structured task. This is a consideration for future research. Constraints were placed upon the research in that as lone researcher, there were occasions when opportunities to scaffold learning, observe, or triangulate in data collection, were missed due to the absence of another adult. As ethnography records over extended periods of time, these opportunities may have been significant to the overall picture.

On balance I believe the advantages of being a teacher researcher in educational ethnography outweigh the disadvantages, when these disadvantages are exposed and considered along with the data analysis for alternative interpretations. The role of teacher researcher should be seen to complement other educational researchers, offering alternative perspectives and contributing to an archive of collective knowledge. I believe Hammersley's (1993) argument to be concerned with research outcomes, which ignore the advantages to teachers of working through the *process* of research, reflecting upon assumptions and existing practices, challenging preconceptions and developing research skills. In the process change comes about, which promotes change in practice.

The second issue is centred around the debate on objectivity and validity (for example Eisner (1993) and Phillips (1993)). Each one of us interprets the world in relation to our own theoretical framework. However, the extent to which that framework influences our interpretations and judgements is crucial to the meanings we attach to our findings, and as such must be acknowledged. Rigour in research design, data collection and analysis exposes our influences and allows others to judge in relation to their own theoretical frameworks. In the differences between the two positions, those that lay claim to objectivity and those that acknowledge subjectivity, (which are not necessarily oppositional), lies the potential for learning from the process of research.

Ball (1993) defines rigour as ‘a demonstrable set of procedures, including the presentation of a research biography.’ (p.46). At the outset of this study I had no preconception of the direction it would take, but an intuitive notion which I was prepared to suspend. I kept field notes, journals, tapes and photographs which became a research biography. This acted as a support in what was otherwise a process which made me feel insecure. The biography was a base to which I could return to reflect, and to which others may refer, for the wealth of data cannot fully be expressed in the space of this study. Progressive analysis of the data encouraged me to step back periodically, holding provisional explanations of the data until such time as they could be confirmed or revised to fit the reality of the situation. The interpretative nature of the study and the focus on subjectivity and intersubjectivity confirm that no claim to objectivity is made. In this I share Eisner’s (1993) view,

....belief, supported by good reasons, is a reasonable and realistic aim for inquiry.

Eisner 1993: 55

The methods of data collection and analysis are reported in ‘thick description’ (Strauss and Corbin, 1990 p.251) to allow for alternative interpretations and replicability. These methods are described and evaluated below in Sections iv. and v. First, I describe the method by which

the children were selected as case studies, Section ii. and the ethical issues connected with the study, Section iii..

## **ii. Selection of the children for case study.**

All children in the class were observed with a broad focus at the beginning of the school year. Those who persistently came into my particular focus of delaying engagement in assigned tasks, and whose behaviours were most frequent, were identified as children who repeatedly procrastinated in assigned tasks.

Over the period of one term, I was concerned that the learning of five children was not progressing at a similar rate to their peers, based on formative teacher assessment in English and Mathematics. There was no apparent reason for this, which might indicate that they would benefit from an Individual Education Plan, in accordance with the Code of Practice (1994). The children's self reports elicited through 'circle time' indicated they were aware of their own procrastinating behaviours. My concern was that if they were consciously aware, then these behaviours were likely to have endured for some time, and were becoming part of their learning identity (Lave, 1988, Lave and Wenger, 1991, Pollard, 1999). As such there was a likelihood they might become habitual and detrimental to learning. Of the thirty children in the class, seven were girls, leaving a high proportion of boys. In this particular class all the children identified were boys, but I have no evidence that this was significant. In another class girls might be more represented.

Informed consent was given as described in the section on ethical considerations. Through a semi-structured interview (Appendix E) which was recorded with permission, I elicited parents' perceptions of the children in respect of attention and attitude to school. This information helped me to understand both parents' and children's expectations of school. I also had due regard for the fact that the children's selection itself impinged upon their learning identities, both positively and negatively, for each individual. What then did these children have in common?

### **Cameos of the children.**

These cameos were written at the beginning of the research, based upon teacher knowledge gained from school records and children's self reports.

**Luke** had three terms in the reception class. He was the younger of two brothers, six and thirteen, who live with their mother and father close to the school. He told me his father went out to work and his mother worked from home. His eyes were bright and usually fixed your attention before he spoke. He loved to talk. On occasions he was downcast, not lifting his head, fixing his eyes purposely to the ground, inviting attention. He often spoke negatively of himself, "I'm *so* stupid.", "I can't...." He would throw utterances into the air, as if waiting for 'someone' to pick them up and engage in conversation, but would not direct a thought to initiate an exchange. Luke procrastinated across a range of assigned curriculum activities, 'stealing' time from the following activities in order to complete a task.

**Joe** had spent two terms in the reception class. He had a sister of nine years, and lived at home with his parents. His grandmother was significant in his home life. His movements were impulsive and jerky, punctuated by nail biting. He procrastinated at the outset of tasks and found alternative interests. He talked imaginatively to peers and tried to draw them into task-irrelevant conversation. He assumed a static posture and air of politeness when communicating with adults. With peer support he embarked upon tasks, but made little contribution in return for their support. With adult support, he was reluctant to offer contributions, laughing self-consciously when he knew he had given something irrelevant or pertaining to a previous activity. He would ask for help when he knew time was short. Help offered *during* activities was not acted upon unless the adult remained with him. He was an affectionate five year old, with an imaginative interest in television characters.

**Gary**, the youngest of the five children, was also five and had an older sister of thirteen. They lived at home with his mother who worked. He had

been in the reception class for just one term. He had worn glasses, which he tended to peer above, since he was two. In class, Gary rarely initiated conversation with adults and was repeatedly brought into the whole group discussions. He frequently received prompts from peers, which he used uncritically. He was well practised at sitting still, unobtrusively. He intently fixed his gaze upon any action, following the progress of any event without comment. He was quick to cry, and was uncomfortable about exposing his understanding. Gary enjoyed drawing and painting, but rarely interacted with his peers as he did so. He 'disappeared' amongst the actions and interactions of the classroom. When he sought help he approached with a whisper to the ear, and although he would tell when he thought he had completed work, he would hide away what he had done. More vocal peers would persist on his behalf when he had worked co-operatively, offering a chance for me to praise him.

**Daniel** was five and had been in the reception class for two terms. He had a younger sister of two and lived with both parents. His father worked but his mother did not. He had dark curly hair and a distracted look. Whilst talking to me, he would be walking away as if to pursue his next thought. He frequently jumped and bounced from one activity to the next, as opposed to walking. In his speech he topic-hopped, leaving the listener to make connections. His conversation changed from reality to fantasy and back again with unswerving ease. In play he referred frequently to adults, attempting to engage them in his play or giving a progress report. He initiated conversations with adults, usually offering a joke he had made up. He appeared obsessive in the pursuit of alternative activities, continually returning to something which occupied him. Unpredictably, he would shoot off into an empty space and run around in circles or chase another child..

**Andrew** had two older brothers and lived at home with a father and his mother. He had been in the reception class for three terms. He gave most concern on account of his unwillingness or inability to participate in tasks, individually, or in small groups, without adult support. In the whole-class situation he gravitated to the periphery of the group but occasionally made valuable contributions to the discussion, which moved the discourse on and

supported others. His literacy and numeracy skills were weak, and he did not express himself well. He was very preoccupied with his own health and ear infections. On occasions he would opt out of all engagement, simply sitting and watching, saying he was worried. Any attempt at progressively differentiating the task or level of support was ineffective, as was changing the task. Medical advice was that there was no cause for concern, although grommets had been fitted.

### **iii. Ethical issues.**

Once I had identified the issue of procrastinating behaviours in the classroom, consent to conduct research within my classroom was sought from the local authority, the governors of the school and the Head teacher. This was freely given on the understanding that I paid regard to ethical issues. Bassey (1999) suggests research ethics falls under three headings: respect for democracy, respect for truth and respect for persons (p.74). With regard to the first of these, I was free to engage in observation and interview so long as I honoured my responsibilities to be truthful and respectful to the individuals concerned. With respect for truth in mind, the steps I took to triangulate in order to report truthfully relate back to the issues of objectivity and subjectivity referred to earlier in the discussion on methodological issues. I endeavoured to

- engage in observation and interview over a period of time which allowed me to reflect and return to the learning situations, to confirm or revise my provisional analysis.
- explore alternative interpretations of behaviours observed by adults present in the classroom.
- question my beliefs of what I said in the course of assigning tasks, checking for ambiguity through probing participant perceptions.
- record the data and analysis systematically in ‘thick description’, so that it might be open to alternative interpretation.
- test my provisional analytical findings with a colleague.

The difficulties in achieving this were:

- In returning to the original data, the children needed to share a common understanding of the event to which I referred. I wished to avoid leading

them for this might have brought a significance to some actions and not others, imposing my perception of the event under scrutiny. My motive in returning to a task appeared to be construed by Joe and Andrew, in particular, as censorship of behaviour in that task, and they elaborated upon events to give a favourable account of themselves.

- Additional adults in the class were there to support learners and I was reluctant to take their time in meeting my observational purposes. On occasions this was agreed outside the usual commitments. Their involvement in observing alongside and post task discussion, brought unanticipated professional development. However, this could not happen regularly due to time constraints.

Case study research is concerned with subjective interpretations and perceptions. In adopting these strategies and exposing possible obstacles to their effectiveness, I have tried to maintain the respect for truth.

Bassey's (1999) third dimension in research ethics, respect for persons, was fundamental to this study. The children themselves were young and could not fully understand the implications of consent. In the course of the study, their relatively weak structural positions were a significant factor in their co-operation. Because of their age, the respect afforded them was extended to their parents who gave informed consent to their participation. I was in a position of trust for they were distanced from the site of the study, though kept informed.

Following selection of the case studies discussed earlier, I sought informed consent of the parents and children. I had in mind the children's rights to privacy and the control of information about themselves. Informed consent was given by the parents on the understanding that if at any stage upon sharing the information gained to date, the parents or child was unhappy, they could withdraw.

Other children in the class participated in the same activities as those observed; yet by virtue of reporting and making record it was necessary to ensure what was reported was, as far as possible, an accurate portrayal of

events as they were perceived by both child and researcher. Regard was given to the effect of differential treatment of chosen children in a class, who participated in interviews then returned to the group to resume their status as peers. Did others see themselves as children not worthy of being selected or relieved not to have been? How would I and the child deal with their curiosity? Children's choice as to whether or not to have information made public to a known audience was respected, and this would have an effect on what was offered. All children were afforded privacy as to the content of interviews. The observed behaviour, though public, was not referred to in the group audience.

All information recorded was available for parental scrutiny at any stage of the data collection, analysis and reporting. Regular feedback was given at least termly and the children, the school and the setting were not identified by their name. Following a period to consider, the parents gave their consent, with the knowledge of the child, for the child to be included in the study. They signed a letter of consent that, based on the understandings given of the child's right to privacy and control of information about themselves, the report may be published.

#### **iv. Methods.**

The principal methods of data collection were participant observation and semi-structured or unstructured interview. This data was progressively analysed as described below, and as patterns emerged theories were refined and the data collection became more focused. Data collection was confined to assigned tasks representing different areas of the curriculum, but reflecting the emphasis on core subjects, English, Mathematics and Science (National Curriculum, 1995).

#### **Participant observation.**

My decision to use participant observation in preference to non-participant observation, was based on my professional experience as a lone adult in the classroom, and previous experience of piloting observation techniques in



connection with Open University (1996) course E835, *Educational Research in Action*.

The advantages of this method were that as participant I could immerse myself in the developing action of the learning situations I observed. I could provisionally identify pivotal points in the life cycle of the task, to be followed up in post-task interview. The difficulties of adopting participant observation were that my presence in the task situation implicitly altered the behaviours of the learners. Their perceptions of my reasons for participating and for observing sensitised them to the behaviours which concerned me. For example, Andrew was observed progressively reducing his cooperation in a mathematics task in which I planned to scaffold ways of making six. On occasions Gary avoided eye contact, Joe shadowed me dependently, Luke searched my face for clues as to his progress and Daniel chatted enthusiastically, keen to let me know his achievements. I propose that had an unfamiliar adult carried out the participant observations, the children's perceptions of *their* expectations would have been different from their perceptions of me in the role, and the responses different. However, as task planner and setter, I believe that acknowledging the influence my presence has, my intentions and motives provide the background against which to reflect upon the observed behaviours. Our mutual relationships, teacher and learner, are a constituent of the learning situation and cannot be viewed in isolation. My prominent position in the frame of observation by virtue of my role as teacher must be acknowledged. However from the children's perspectives I have no evidence to suggest and do not believe my role as observer altered their course of behaviour any more than their perception of myself as teacher did. This apparent contradiction made me aware of the responsibilities I needed to balance in order to pursue my dual role of teacher researcher.

As far as possible, I took a holistic view of the task, although my participant role was reduced in some observations and heightened in others. In situations where I worked with a single child, the observations were participatory, recorded as field notes simultaneously with the activity.

Where the focus child was engaged with a peer, in an effort not to disrupt their interactions, I made observational sweeps of their activity, each three minutes making field notes, (Appendix A). Where another adult was present I made continuous notes for the duration of the task, and did not resist responding to children. Field notes for all types of observation were written up in a research journal within twenty four hours. By virtue of my presence in the classroom with overall responsibility for the children, and by virtue of the principal aim of my observations to understand from the child's perspective, I became involved in all the tasks to some degree. This interaction with the children defined the observations as participatory.

The disadvantages of being participant observer were in the main related to the attention I felt I could legitimately focus upon the particular learner, whilst having a duty to all children in the class. I adopted a monitoring role for the other children in the class and devised strategies to let children know a teaching point would be followed up (for instance, a note to the learner or enlisting peer support). These coping devices for both children and myself as observer were developed over the period in which the data was collected. At the outset children were more dependent and the observations shorter. In addition to my classroom role, I was working in a school community and had a duty there. On occasions unanticipated interruptions deflected my observations, and as a consequence of the interruption, the course of the learners' behaviours. Where this occurred, it was reported in the field notes and written in the journal. Use of a video camera may have been helpful in sustaining the thread of activity. This was discounted on the grounds that the single perspective which would result if the camera was mounted, would not be as informative as my perspective in and of the action. An alternative would have been for a second person to operate a hand held camera, but this would have altered the composition of the class group, fulfilling a role for my purposes not the learners', so this option was discounted.

## **Interviews.**

Through interview I came closest to the children's worlds, their perceptions, expectations, curiosity and anxieties. For me, the time given to interview was the most illuminating, although it could not be divorced from the observations made. The observations were viewed against the criteria I set as teacher and task-setter. The interviews, both unstructured and semi-structured, allowed inclusion of unanticipated agendas. These challenged or confirmed my provisional theorising, and on occasions offered new direction. Luke provided an example of this when he drew my attention to his perception of the way I control their choice of work and play. I followed this up with other children to discern any pattern.

Interviews were conducted usually in the lunch-time period in the naturalistic setting of the classroom. With permission these were recorded for transcription, whilst I made field notes on non-verbal behaviour, signposted in relation to the spoken words. Where other adults were present and listening, after the interview I enlisted their perception of my questioning and the meaning of responses. This was recorded in field notes which were transferred to the research journal with the transcription. Recordings were transcribed in full to include intonation, non-verbal language and pauses. I felt such transcription to be important because of my interest in the cumulative and continuous processes which may constitute the child's experience and search for meaning. Maintaining the text in full allowed me, in analysis, to track any developing themes or knowledge the child used, then make the decision whether to follow these themes in future data collection, progressively focusing. A second reason for maintaining the text in full, including the physical context and persons present, is to give scope for verifying interpretations and increasing reliability. All transcriptions were dated and coded according to emerging themes and behavioural typologies. The recordings remained intact for recourse to scrutiny if required. Tizard and Hughes' (1991) experience, having used transcription codes to address a dynamic situation served as a warning to me to ensure I kept as much of the dialogue and its situation intact. They wrote,

...our codes were insufficiently sensitive to bring out the relationship which we felt existed between the kind of activity and the quality of talk. (This) dissatisfaction....decided us to make a qualitative analysis of some of the conversations. Another factor was our increasing interest in issues which we had not foreseen at the start of the study.... Moreover, in talking about our findings more widely among groups of practitioners, it was clear that the presentation of illustrative conversations helped considerably in communicating the quantitative findings.

Tizard and Hughes 1991:30

An additional source which helped in maintaining and restoring context in interview was photographs of the children engaged in tasks. These acted as prompts in returning to a learning situation that I wished to explore further, for example in interview with Luke following the unexpected theme of differences between work and play.

In two semi-structured interviews designed to explore themes which had emerged from the data, I wished to probe affective issues such as attitudes to school, self perceptions in relation to peers and issues of power and control in decision making. Interviews ran for approximately twenty minutes, although this varied with individuals, Gary providing brief sequences which were predominantly elicited, and Daniel creatively elaborating. All interviews were transcribed within twenty four hours and the recording was reviewed by the learners, confirmed or revised. In the event of revisions, these were added at the end of the original transcript together with my reflections. Appendix B contains an example of the method of transcription in a semi-structured interview.

### **Disadvantages of the methods used.**

Interviews were conducted outside the learning timetable. Although it was common practice for children to spend some time in the classrooms at lunch-time, some valued their playtime. Whilst complying with my 'polite

requests' (Manke, 1997 p.77) to talk with them, they were foregoing opportunity to negotiate roles in playground activities, which had the potential to leave them outside games which had already been organised when they arrived. In post-task unstructured interviews, an excerpt from which is included in Appendix C, my efforts to understand the procrastinating behaviours, and share my interpretation of them, led to a tendency to focus on the non-participatory aspects of the tasks. In talking about these behaviours, I was aware that I could be reinforcing them, and thereby reducing options for individuals to alter their own behaviours. My attention to them may have defined them as belonging to those individuals, although I was at pains to avoid this by following the children's lead in conversation, encouraging them to expand where this enlightened my observations. I then followed a format described by Bennett et al. (1984) as 'a diagnostic interview' whereby I followed the children's thinking, asking further questions until I could understand observed responses to the task from their perspective.

Whether unstructured or semi-structured, the interviews were intended to explore perceptions. My professional experience makes me aware of the tendency for learners to 'guess what is in the teacher's mind' and accordingly provide an answer to match their perceived expectation. It was important to establish trust and a common understanding of the intention and purpose of the questioning and to listen with an open mind. Oppenheim (1992) wrote of 'exploratory depth interviews':

Depth interviewers must ....'listen with the third ear'.

They must note, not only what is said but also what is being omitted; must pick up gaps and hesitations and explore what lies behind them....

Oppenheim 1992:67

This is particularly true where children move beyond factual responses to giving those which indicate attitudes and affect. The effects of audience in any situation cannot be eradicated; what is said can only be interpreted in the context in which it is said. This was problematical with Gary, for as has been mentioned, his responses in interview were not elaborated. This made

it essential to examine which utterances were freely given and which elicited. By continuously evaluating what was said during the interview, and reflecting upon that in listening to recordings and transcribing, I tried to remain open in my interpretation, in order to reduce any bias or misunderstanding that might occur due to my role as teacher researcher.

In one assigned task a dictaphone was used to supplement my observations, recording dialogue between peers. This task involved two children at the computer, who had their backs to me as an observer. I had attempted to use tape recording for other tasks. The recorder was generally unobtrusive, after a period of getting used to its presence. However, recording dialogue in the classroom with background noise had its own drawbacks. This was in part overcome by same-day transcriptions, so that the tape could be returned to the speaker to confirm any uncertainties; but this was not entirely satisfactory. The transcriptions were analysed as part of the learning context to supplement observations and interviews. Dialogue *per se* was not the focus of this study.

#### **v. Data collection and analysis.**

##### **The process.**

Assigned tasks were the site of the procrastinating behaviours. I use 'the task' to refer to the wide and complex learning situation. An overview of the twenty eight assigned tasks observed, their organisation, purpose, and expected outcomes, is included in Appendix D. Some children were observed participating in the same tasks, giving a total of thirty six tasks. It was common practice for the children to gather on the carpet at the beginning of the morning, mid-morning and in the afternoon, when I would set out the programme of activities for that session. Tasks involved the whole class or small groups, or were planned for individuals. Small group work was outlined to the whole group. Following the dismissal of all children to their assigned task, I planned to visit each group in turn, reiterating any teaching and checking understanding of the task objective. Where I had planned a teaching input, I would return to that group and monitor the remaining groups with periodic visual sweeps. This

organisation became part of the routinised culture of the classroom through which the tasks were communicated, and was included in the observations made.

The decision as to which tasks to observe was taken on the grounds of previous assessment of the children's learning and their target objective. In order that tasks should reflect behaviours across the curriculum, all children were observed in seat work tasks, practical tasks which demanded personal organisational skills, and problem solving tasks.

Thirty six tasks were observed giving approximately eighteen hours of observations. In addition, around six hours of post-task interviews and six hours semi-structured interviews interweave the observations, to give in total thirty hours of data. By virtue of my position as teacher researcher additional time was spent in recording incidental and anecdotal information which informed my data collection and analysis. The analysis draws together the data from a variety of sources, focused on the issue of procrastinating behaviours, in a framework of inquiry which is the foundation for a new knowledge base.

To begin, I needed to ascertain whether the problem I perceived was part of the reality of the classroom. I kept a log of observations in the course of assigned tasks and circle times, noting comments from children and listening to their conversations. This gave me raw data from which I could provisionally discern children's self perceptions. Luke, for instance, placed emphasis on what he could *not* do, and Daniel found activities on the periphery of assigned tasks which sustained his interest. This was at the beginning of the school year, which was significant, for as Ball (1993) points out,

Unusual, unrepeated, and important things happen in these initial encounters.....Much of the order of classroom life rests upon conflicts and negotiations which take place in the first few weeks of the new school year.

Ball 1993: 39

I followed the children who persistently came into my focus in relation to my reading of the relevant literature and observations I had made to date. Gradually this raw data formed profiles for individual children, and at this stage informed consent was sought. The field notes were stored as the beginning of case records for the five children. I continued to make observations and hold interviews with the children over a period of twenty months. The dated field notes were recorded in a journal from which key words were distilled and stored as part of the individual profiles. Daniel's profile for instance showed he frequently sought 'alternative activities', whilst Joe was 'distanced' and in conversation disclosed he had 'other agendas'. These key words became the conceptual basis for discerning patterns of behaviours for individuals and across tasks. As a concept emerged, I returned to the existing data to see if it could be supported. Where evidence was found in one case profile, I explored the concept in future data collection, as in the power issue of work and play, referred to above. In the same way as the key concepts suggested issues to explore, behavioural descriptions provided evidence that informed my typology.

I scrutinised the data, focusing on emerging themes which would lead to a theory of procrastinating behaviours. In the data I looked for common patterns of behaviour in response to task demands, to group organisation, to my own response to the behaviours and to intervention. I searched the transcriptions for evidence to support the affective theme which emerged. What did they feel they were good at? What experiences contributed to their learning identities? The theme of sharing a common understanding of a task was identified concurrently with my reading of Rogoff (1993) and Chaiklin and Lave (1996). Themes of learning identities, and power and



control emerged across all the case studies but held different meanings for all participants. In this case the themes returned me to search for literature new to me (Manke, 1997, Pollard, 1999).

My data analysis, informed by a concurrent reading of literature, gave a theoretical and conceptual framework to events in the classroom. I was able to relate the theoretical framework in social constructivism to its practical implementation in the classroom, explore the tensions and dilemmas associated with it and recognise its implications for curriculum learning. Theories of learning informed the cognitive and pedagogic issues, and from this the discursive nature of learning emerged, giving predominance to the importance of the communicative process, the second theme in this study. Socio-cultural issues emerged from these two themes which are elaborated in Chapters 2 and 4. To demonstrate how the literature was interwoven with the data collection, the issue of teacher's power, actual and perceived, arose in observations of two children around the same time. I returned to the literature to discover what had been written on this issue, becoming immersed in the data retrospectively and looking ahead to see how this issue might best be explored. Other issues which arose in connection with this, for example the criteria by which children judged their work to meet expectations, were treated in the same way to establish whether there was a robust enough category to become part of the framework of analysis.

I found the most difficult aspect of the analysis process was the interpretation of the data which would support an emerging theory. The interpretation was problematical for two reasons. First, I was aware of the preconceptions I brought to the data and wished to be sure I was not imposing these upon it. This was an uncomfortable process, examining my theoretical framework and my own coping strategies in relation to this. My role as teacher seemed increasingly prominent as a factor in the incidence of procrastinating behaviours. Secondly, I was aware of the vulnerability of the children and the fragility of their responses, in the sense that the very situation they found themselves in influenced what they had to say. The framework of inquiry had to be robust to establish as far as was possible,

that the children's responses were representative of the problem as I saw it. Reluctance to leave an issue meant that the same ground was covered from different perspectives and the children became sensitised to this, as Andrew showed when he said, in an irritated fashion, '*I told you....*'.

The process of theorisation was difficult in that I found very little in the literature which reflected my concern with procrastinating behaviours. The archive of data I accumulated was the main source for my theorising. There was some overlap where quantitative and qualitative methods were mixed in school effectiveness studies (Bennett et al. 1984, Galton et al. 1980, 1999, Mortimore 1988, Alexander 1995). These focused on 'time off task' behaviours and are reviewed in Chapter 2. My study was aimed at furthering understanding rather than providing answers and there are still many questions remaining. These are set out in the final Chapter 5.

### **The implications for my professional development.**

Engaging with this study has heightened my observational skills. In the iterative process of the research, I became aware that I paid greater attention to the inclusive situation in which the learning took place and the way language was used, both by myself as teacher, and the child. Given further opportunities to research, I would like to explore alternative observational schedules based on the knowledge base I now have. For example, I would like to observe the approaches children use to analyse tasks, in order to answer the question,

- How are children who repeatedly procrastinate equipped to analyse assigned tasks?

I anticipate this would involve observing their independent use of strategies which have been scaffolded, in order to encourage their approach to assigned tasks. I would welcome the opportunity to share the development of observational skills with colleagues in the same learning situation, in order that we may mutually support each other.

I also had a heightened sense of the influence I unintentionally held over the children. This came to the fore in interviews. Whilst I have begun to

develop my skills of interviewing, particularly as a listener, I would be interested in developing my skills in the structure and conduct of semi-structured interviews. This would be valuable for gaining insights into children's perceptions, where new approaches to meet preferred learning styles are introduced.

#### **vi. Summary.**

I used an ethnographic case study approach in order to capitalise on my position of teacher researcher, and capture the dynamic learning situations of the classroom, their subtleties and complexities. The methodological tools were predominantly participant observation and unstructured interview, reflecting the age of the children in focus. Data was collected and analysed concurrently with a review of the literature. Two themes emerged from the literature, social constructivist learning theories and the communicative process, with a continual dialogue between the two. With reference to the conceptual framework, discrepancies and conflicts or dilemmas were considered allowing some support for alternative interpretations. As data was analysed progressive focusing suggested themes which also emerged as strands in the literature. The observations were scrutinised for emerging patterns which described a range of observed behaviours for individuals. This typology of behaviours, the two themes and strands provided the framework for analysis and a theory of procrastinating behaviours in an infant classroom. The action of carrying out the research is one of self development, which in the process feeds into practice in the immediate learning community of the school. Grounded in practice it has the potential to reach multiple audiences of those concerned with increasing participation.

## **CHAPTER 4: COMING TO UNDERSTAND PROCRASTINATING BEHAVIOURS.**

### **i. Introduction.**

Through observation and interview transcription as outlined in the methodology, I address the research questions restated here:

- What possible interpretations of procrastinating behaviours are offered by social constructivist theories of learning?
- In individual and collaborative assigned tasks, what are the possible links between communication and procrastinating behaviours?
- What influence do individuals' learning identities have in determining co-participation towards a shared purpose?
- In the recursive sequence of teaching, learning and assessment, what role does the distribution of power play in the incidence of procrastinating behaviours?

Arising from these questions I aim to explain the circumstances which give rise to them and the means by which they may be reduced by teacher and learner, and I suggest strategies which may replace them.

In this chapter 'tasks' are those included in the overview of tasks, Appendix D, and referred to by number in order of description in this chapter. For instance the first task is Luke's mathematical task and that is (1). The discussion in this chapter is prefaced by a reaffirmation of apparent contradictions and tensions inherent in the study of procrastinating behaviours in my infant classroom. First, I hold a social constructivist view of learning yet focus for the purposes of this study upon assigned tasks. Secondly, the study is overtly premised upon a theory of participation, yet underlying this is a theory of transmission of knowledge. Thirdly, I focus upon behaviours I see as problematical, yet these are defined in the situations I create. These contradictions spur tensions surrounding individual attainment and group learning, altruism and self interest, entitlement and differentiation, choice and planning. The will to reconcile

these tensions has led to my need to understand the procrastinating behaviours.

The main issues from a review of the literature surrounding procrastinating behaviours are:

- The various interpretations which may be placed upon them from social constructivist theoretical perspectives and what these mean in practice
- The organisation and management of tasks and their success in promoting social, cognitive and managerial purposes to include all learners
- The creation of common understanding through the communicative process in assigned tasks, which may include, but is not solely, communicative competence
- The constitution and effect of learning identities
- The controlling and controlled nature of procrastinating behaviours in the distribution of power
- The potential of assessment, particularly formative assessment, for reducing the incidence of those behaviours.

In analysing this data I address my first research question and ask what these theoretical perspectives have to offer in understanding procrastinating behaviours. I then consider the **dilemmas and tensions** which arise in translating those social constructivist perspectives into practice and ask what in the learning situation may give rise to procrastinating behaviours. Next I consider my second question looking at the links between communication, **task organisation and management**, and procrastinating behaviours. I suggest ways these behaviours may be reduced by both teacher and learner. I appraise the use of Bennett et al.'s task categories (1984) and suggest that the categories reflect a more static view of learning than this present study adopts. Using observations and interview transcriptions I examine the means by which the **same understanding of a task is created** between teacher and learner. My third question concerns the relationship between learning identities and procrastinating behaviours and I look at what is communicated in tasks which impinges upon an individual's **learning identity**, and may in turn

promote, maintain or reduce these behaviours. I interpret both solicited and unsolicited references to identities in light of the tasks I organise and manage, and the way we co-construct meaning. In addressing my final question I consider the constraining and liberating communication of **power** in learning conversations. Using the illustrative tasks, I suggest strategies which may replace procrastinating behaviours.

In the course of data collection and analysis I observed the learner's procrastinating behaviours in response to a variety of tasks and contexts. These behaviours are described in the following typology.

### **A typology of behaviours.**

My expectation of an ideal learner is a child who challenges the reality of his or her world, through self-initiated inquiry; who plays a significant role in both adult - learner, and peer - peer learning situations; who reflects on past experiences to make sense of new opportunities. Ideologically, this child progresses competently in oracy skills through which learning progresses, and maintains a successful balance between social and task related talk. A child who repeatedly procrastinates challenges this ideal. The range of behaviours which may characterise procrastination is set out in the following typology which has emerged from analysis of my data.

The typology is divided into those behaviours which may indicate that, in response to instructions, the child is:

i. **Conforming** in order to meet the explicit and/or implicit expectations interpreted by the learner. Descriptors of such behaviours may include cooperation, compliance, acceptance, and reticence. I suggest typical behaviours are: settling quickly at the outset of a task, cowed body language, minimal talk with a tendency to trail spoken words, concern with appearance, avoidance of or confusion on direct questioning, repetitive outcomes which stretch to the time allowed by the teacher for the task to be completed; and where choice of level of difficulty is available there is a tendency to choose low risk tasks, resisting challenge.

ii. **Distracted** in efforts to meet the explicit and/or implicit expectations interpreted by the learner. Descriptors of these behaviours may include intermittent application, ambivalence, seeking instructions or support vicariously. Upon questioning they may observe others, imitate, or use backtracking and non-specific language. There is an inclination to stay in one social or learning space, to indiscriminately subscribe to others' interpretations, to erase and multiply overwrite and to await attention.

iii. **Negotiating**, with the task setter whether peer or teacher, in order to alter the explicit and/or implicit interpreted expectations, and to marry the learner's and teacher's expectations. Descriptors of these behaviours may include cooperation, forward planning and self-isolation. Characteristically questioning is self-initiated using long utterances, there are efforts to negotiate inclusion within groups through social and task-related talk, to conditionally negotiate the quantity or duration of a task, to select an 'appropriate' role model to shadow, to seek conversation in 'valued' talk that is not task relevant. This talk is construed by the learner as valued by the teacher, and as talk which may draw praise.

iv. **Disrupting** in order to reject the explicit and /or implicit interpreted expectations. Descriptors may include defiance and self-deprecation. The behaviours tend to include both overt and covert demonstration against the task, rejection of support, seeking alternative activity, and elusiveness in response to questioning. Disrupting in this case is taken to mean disrupting to the learning community, the teacher, peers and to the individual's learning.

Whilst the typology serves to describe the behaviours, a single learner may range across any combination of these behaviours during the course of a task. For example, the aptitudes and social mix of co-participants and the availability of support may influence responsive behaviours. Equally, a learner may adopt one mode of behaviour in one task, but respond differently in another.

## ii. Social constructivist perspectives on procrastinating behaviours.

### **‘Scaffolding’ and procrastination.**

*Luke **distracted** in a mathematical task.*

The following task illustrates the issues raised in applying social constructivist theories of learning in practice, and the way in which these may give rise to procrastinating behaviours. It addresses the question

- What possible interpretations of procrastinating behaviours are offered by social constructivist theories of learning?

Given my social constructivist view of learning, theoretical interpretations of the behaviours permeate throughout all my research questions. I bring these perspectives to the fore in addressing this question, whilst holding its significance in the following questions. I begin by analysing Luke’s task (1) which was scaffolded between teacher and learner after the Vygotskian paradigm described in Chapter 2. I made assumptions about Luke’s existing learning, the way he would bridge from everyday to curriculum learning, and about his social competencies. My contingency plan, though not my initial intention, was to ‘scaffold’ his learning. This occurred as a reactive intervention outside the allotted time, which in itself is indicative of the time constraints on scaffolding in classroom learning. My assumption that the task was appropriately matched to Luke in cognitive difficulty was well founded, but this alone did not prove to be sufficiently motivating. In addition, the task shows that participation in discourse and discursive skills which facilitate learning are not used intuitively by all children. These skills need to be practised and developed in supported activity, which in turn needs to be consciously managed by teacher and learner. The failure to make these skills explicit and available to Luke appeared to contribute to his procrastinating behaviours.

Luke was ***distracted*** during most of this mathematical task, following interests shared with his neighbour. It was planned that children should work individually on identical tasks, with an implicit requirement for co-operation. I intended to monitor a group of children, which did not include Luke, whilst he used the support of his regular peer group. As teacher- researcher, I would observe him once each three minutes. The key



objective of the task was to find totals of ten pence, using one, two and five pence coins. The previous day, Luke in his regular group of four had visited the class shop where he found ways of spending ten pence, buying a variety of supermarket goods that peers had priced below ten pence. I listened to the group in conversation and assessed their collective efforts, as they tested tentative predictions and calculations. Prior to this, Luke had found coins hidden in the sand tray, presenting them to the 'bank' when he had exactly ten pence. Groups rotated through activities moving from experiential play to seatwork, which was intended to offer new applications for the learning or assess their understanding of the key concept. The importance of the child engaging in task-related activity, and the teacher knowing the existing understanding of the concept to be taught, was discussed in Chapter 2 with reference to Vygotsky (1962, 1978).

It was Luke's turn to record the coins used to make ten pence, and this task was presented in an individual workbook. Using collective remembering, I helped the group to recall the previous activities, and checked that they could tell me the value of the coins which they had with them. I left implicit the requirement for group discussion to support each other, for I believed the participants had sufficient understanding to proceed. Blank circles of differing sizes were drawn in the workbooks to indicate the coins required. I worked the first problem as an example and left the group. There were several reasons why I expected Luke to participate in this task. First I needed to assess whether his practical experience had provided the foundation for mental strategies. Secondly, for ease of classroom organisation a mixture of practical and seatwork tasks extended the physical resources available. Thirdly, there was a perceived requirement of me that I should provide some record of the outcomes of practical tasks and I wanted this to involve the learner.

Luke challenged this plan. He was joined by a child *A.* engaged on an unrelated mathematical task, which also demanded an individual outcome. He sat by Luke because his place was taken by a visiting adult. My journal entry takes up the story;

11.00 Noise level has mounted at Luke's table. I call across to ask if there is something he doesn't understand. He does not reply, but straightens his book and picks up a pencil, poised as if to write.

11.03 Arm round A's neck, rolling pencils from the table to the floor, laughing. Go to him, give extra tin of money - real coins. Stay with him to work first problem, matching coins to circle size. He tells me the right coins. Speak with A. and leave L. to record. Return to my group. ....

11.22 A. with his bottom in the air, has taken the tin of coins. I check Luke - nothing written. Ask him to write and mark others' work.....

11.30 Ask class to gather for review of work. L. stays. Ask him to come. He begins to cry.

Field notes: 23 January

Luke's procrastinating behaviour was described as *distracted* because the activity which was not task related took priority over the task. Apparently, his social activity with the neighbour held most interest and was *his* chosen activity. In the action of scaffolding which followed, his choice was restricted by my intervention.

11.55 I sit with him, read the price tag, 7p. Point to the 5p circle. 'Seven pence is five pence and...?' leave a space for response. L. scans my face for clues. I say 'Five and what makes seven? 'Two' he says quickly. He checks by size.

Field notes: 23 January

From this point he sat up, looking more interested, and worked on without support. Anxious to see whether he could generalise this matching strategy to other problems, I asked 'What does that tell you about the small circles then?... the large circles?'. He was able to answer appropriately. I turned the page and he suggested five pence and one pence, would make ten pence. Reflecting what he said, I asked if that made ten and he said 'No'

assertively. Gradually, though not in a linear sequence, the strategy became a mental strategy, at first supported by physically checking. Unsure at the beginning, he scanned my face for clues to the right answer. Bolstered by success, he took responsibility;

We know the little one is five, and the medium one is  
two.....and the last one is...

Luke (1): 6

Then suddenly he stopped. 'I've forgotten what we have to do on this one now.' I picked up his thinking again, leaving space for his contributions. He immediately took up the challenge and continued working alone.

In the Vygotskian paradigm, Luke's *distracted* behaviour before scaffolding, is explained in factors inherent in the task, or within the culture of the classroom. First, as discussed earlier with reference to Bruner (1996) and Lave (1988), at the outset Luke was not helped to bridge the gap between 'understanding in practice' and decontextualised learning valued in schools. Like the children Bennett (1994) observed, he did not share the same overview of the curriculum purpose of the task as the teacher. In my initial intervention I offered an alternative strategy to that expected at the outset. I envisaged that matching the coins by size would be less open to error than the mental strategies I expected in setting the task. In addition, this physical action was observable, hence easy to monitor, detecting sources of error. In responding to the behaviours, I effectively altered the nature of the task from mental to procedural, from possible to prescribed strategies. Control of learning remained with the teacher. In scaffolding the task, I led, but kept the learner in view, sharing the control system and modelling exchange of task-related conversation.

Secondly, Luke may not have been motivated to search for personal meaning in this individual task. In interview he gave a glimpse of his view of learning and expectation of school,

Luke: I can't work by myself. I get an adult to help me.

Teacher: And how will that adult help?

Luke: They've got to help me because I don't know the answers.

Interview 3 March : 62 - 64

His apparent dependence reflects Augstein and Thomas' (1991) claim that some learners believe that learning is an asymmetric conversation, lead by the teacher from whom learning comes:

The dependent learner is one who has been exposed to and accepted the control system offered by a teacher.....  
their own search for meaning is limited to becoming  
'like teacher' otherwise it is switched off.

Augstein and Thomas (1991:86)

My response to Luke's procrastinating behaviours before scaffolding, did not fit his expectation. Management of classroom time and events was an important factor in the duration of those behaviours, which confirms the findings of Alexander (1995) and Bennett et al (1984) discussed in the literature review. In scaffolding, I perpetuated his dependency in giving him individual attention. This was weighed against the insights I gained through discourse with him.

This task was cognitively matched to Luke's existing understanding, as was demonstrated in everyday situations before and after. Through scaffolding, the connections with this experience and procedural strategies were made explicit. I led, but kept the learner in view, sharing the control system and modelling the exchange of task related conversation. In partnership with a more experienced other, Luke could use support contingently, as a *loan of consciousness*, described in the literature by Bruner (1985). In the absence of explicit scaffolding from existing to new learning, Luke refocused his attention on social interests, whilst seeking to maintain dual status. His view of learning constructed over time helped maintain his procrastinating behaviours. He did not appear to have the goal of participation in focus. Had the opportunity to scaffold the task been available earlier, the procrastinating behaviours might have been reduced.

### **The constraints upon scaffolding.**

Luke's mathematical task (1) highlights the difficulties in reducing procrastination through scaffolding in a whole class situation. In this case, what reduced the behaviours was dyadic scaffolding which occurred outside the curriculum time. This particular attention for Luke may have been significant, others may have rejected it. For me as teacher, in this instance I found scaffolding used my time well. On other occasions alternative demands on time may not make this possible.

In the Vygotskian paradigm, procrastinating behaviours in scaffolded tasks would not be viewed as detrimental to learning because contingent support would ensure participation. Decontextualised curriculum learning as this proved to be has to become personally meaningful. The nature of what is available to be learnt will influence the incidence of these behaviours and it must be accessible. If the learner is to be supported through contingent teaching this has implications for organisation and management. Scaffolding learning for multiple individuals becomes prohibitively time-consuming. Where the learner holds a solely individualistic view of learning, in classroom settings constrained by time, procrastinating behaviours are likely to persist.

Analysis of sociocultural perspectives on the procrastinating behaviours points to the constraints of time, for change does not always follow the predicted path. The goal to mature participation in Luke's task (1), through peripheral, then supported to full participation, took time beyond that intended. The delay of necessary support towards that goal, led to prolonged procrastinating behaviours. These behaviours were curtailed through adult support, which demanded taking time for diagnostic conversation. Making time for individuals within a class community is one of the dilemmas in translating theory into practice. Focus on individuals leads to differential treatment, which may be perceived as unwelcome amongst children concerned to preserve their status in the eyes of their peers. This brings a further dilemma. I believe Luke's laughter with his neighbour and his tears as the task drew to an end, are indicative of this

status dilemma. Such sociocultural perspectives clearly contribute to understanding the incidence of procrastination. Together with issues of task organisation and management, they have the potential to reduce the incidence of procrastinating behaviours, but the complexity in reality cannot be underestimated.

### **The educational implications of social constructivism for procrastinating behaviours.**

In decontextualised curriculum learning, children may need support in bridging the gap from their experience and knowledge to the new learning. The child is helped by sharing the teacher's view of where the learning fits in to previous learning and its worthwhileness in terms of their future learning. Prescriptive strategies that restrict the opportunities for choice and foster dependence should be replaced by shared control. This may be achieved through discourse, modelling task-related conversation and task analysis, for cognitively matching tasks without regard for procedural skills is insufficient to ensure engagement. The constraints upon achieving this for multiple perspectives in the whole class situation relate to time and task management. For those children who repeatedly procrastinate within the whole class group, management which shares control and respects their socio-cultural needs may well reduce the incidence of procrastinating behaviours.

### **iii. Task organisation and management.**

In order to address my second research question

- In individual and collaborative assigned tasks, what are the links between the communicative process and procrastinating behaviours?

it is necessary to consider the two inter-related themes of task organisation and management, and the creation of common understanding. I believe procrastinating behaviours themselves may arise because of the nature of the tasks, their fit with the learner's existing experience and knowledge, and their management in terms of pace, duration and groupings. The task in which the children I focus upon are engaged is a task within the context of many simultaneous tasks in the classroom. Therefore the classroom

organisation and management, both explicit and implicit, intended and unintended are also important to the incidence of procrastinating behaviours. The generic tasks involved within the assigned task (Alexander, 1995) may also have an impact upon the responsive behaviours. Interwoven with the task organisation and management is the continual creation of the communicative process, the way participants in the task are helped to understand. This may be by conscious intervention as in Luke's task (1) described earlier in this chapter, or vicariously as a peripheral participant (Lave, 1988, Lave and Wenger, 1991, Chaiklin and Lave, 1996, Rogoff, 1990, 1993). Task organisation and management and the communicative processes associated with these are fundamental to the following two research questions. I therefore devote more time to them in this section, making reference to it when exploring the subsequent research questions.

### **Teacher and learner organisation and management.**

Tasks organised and managed with the intention to scaffold from existing to new learning, are subjectively interpreted by the learners. These intentions are altered by procrastinating behaviours which themselves organise and manage, consciously and unconsciously. Luke forced me to return to his existing knowledge, before he applied mental strategies. Daniel, in the following individual task, task (2) discussed below, pursued a strategy recognised by Rogoff (1989);

...adults determine the activities in which children's participation is allowed or discouraged....adults arrange the social environment to promote or avoid certain relationships although children are very active in directing adults towards desirable or away from undesirable activities.

Rogoff 1989:77

In the process Daniel altered the task to confirm his existing knowledge. He is likened to Adam discussed in McDermott (1996) in the literature review. He avoided questions and led the direction of the task. However, the reciprocal nature of constructing learning cannot be overlooked. As teacher, I gave Daniel initiative in the direction of conversation, and did not

successfully guide him to new knowledge. The data confirms one of the reasons for the absence of scaffolding learning, found by Biggs (1996) and discussed in the review of the literature, Chapter 2.

Daniel *negotiated* in this science/mathematical task until he accepted peer modelling of procedures. His behaviour was *negotiating* in terms of my typology, for he isolated himself at the outset of the task, engaged in activity quickly, maintained a semblance of co-operation, and initiated long utterances which, though not task relevant, were directed to what he interpreted as teacher-valued talk. The task, to explore light reflection leading to reflective symmetry, involved children working in pairs on one task for a joint outcome. Although the teacher intention was not met, the task was not outrightly rejected.

The key objective was to recognise reflective symmetry using scientific and mathematical language to explain what was seen. Existing knowledge and previous experience were explicitly discussed in the class group, led by the teacher. Luke, interested in an experiment in a science book, took an instrumental part in leading the class discussion. Reportedly, Daniel and he were rivals in their creative and inventive thinking, and this may have influenced Daniel's approach to the task. It is interesting to conjecture the outcome had they worked together. I intended children should work in self-chosen pairs in order to stimulate discussion, then join with another pair to compare, challenge and support each other.

At the outset, Daniel asked to work alone, settling at the end of a table distanced from three other children working there and initialling fending off 'intrusions' from others. His reasons for working alone were not pursued, but as Rogoff (1999) suggested and the forthcoming interview data would seem to confirm, Daniel may have been concerned

about the effort or risk of collaborative work - even though the collaboration may be more effective than the individual work.

Rogoff 1999:75



I watched him as he drew a rectangle freehand and placed the mirror across its estimated central point. He dropped the mirror, turned the rectangle into a bus and began to colour. Passengers were added at the windows, and the colouring was aborted in favour of giving the passengers individual expressions. Concerned that this task would be devoid of conversation for him and aware as Lave and Wenger (1991) wrote that

.....*changing* locations and perspectives are part of actors' learning trajectories, developing identities, and forms of membership

Lave and Wenger 1991:35 -36

I sat beside him and asked him what he was doing (a polite request as described by Manke (1997) and discussed in the literature review). In the introduction children had suggested ways they might get started, and Daniel seemed confused in his interpretation of their suggestions.

Daniel: Well I ....had a look in the mirror then I drewed it easily....and that's how it goes....and some people....I didn't...I draw some people in ...that is for another person who didn't want to get on, then the driver, there's the door.....

Daniel (2):20

Daniel, it appeared, attempted to make sense of some misunderstanding in the presentation and wanted to put it aside, moving on to what he did understand. I wanted to refer him back to the intended task, yet understand why he had made the choice he had. We were communicating to different purposes.

Teacher: What happens when you make a reflection of your drawing?

.....

Daniel: And well... if you come to the bus stop....then....then the light bounces off of the glass and then I can see the bus...if I'm inside

Teacher: What happens if the light bounces off this special glass that makes a mirror?

Daniel: Well ....it bounces back.... and if another mirror is there.....then it bounces on to another one, like an opening door to it (raises his arms indicating the light bouncing and zigzagging up left to right as it hits his hand - the door) And if it hits a moon....a round moon and it lights up, then it might open a secret door.

Daniel (2): 21-25

A keyword in the introduction of the task had been *reflection*. When I questioned Daniel, he related his own experience of sitting on a bus, watching himself reflected in the plastic bus shelter. This explained his initial engagement with the task, but once this was completed he appeared to lose direction. He evaded my questioning, devised to draw him into my intentions,

Daniel: Look in the box..

Teacher: Where am I looking?

Daniel: there... and now look (sings) let's play a game

Teacher: Well, what's happening Daniel?

Daniel: My fingers are dancing on one hand (As he makes them travel on the mirror) and if another finger comes along, there are two like Romeo and Juliet....

Romeo has to try and save Juliet from a high tower....

and he takes her back to his house because she might be in trouble of a witch.....

a witch might be hidden in a tower.....

Daniel (2): 77-89

He then 'topic hopped' and returned to the mirror, setting me a question and asserting his **control** of the situation. He hid the mirror under a box and asked me what would happen. As I resumed my questioning, he resumed his exploration. At this stage other children came to show me their images and drew Daniel into looking at their shapes. Only after this did he follow the example of his peers and explore regular and irregular shapes, watching and shrieking with glee as the images changed according to where the mirrors were positioned.

In a post task interview, ((2) 4 November) recalling the way he had fended off 'intrusions' at the outset, I asked if he liked other people seeing what he was doing,

Daniel: Uh um (confirms by intonation)

Teacher: Lots of people kept coming and showing us what they were doing, didn't they? Did they give you any ideas?

Daniel: No. I've got my own ideas in my head

Teacher: Right. Do other people know your ideas?

Daniel: No...No unless I tell them

Teacher: And do you tell them?

Daniel: Sometimes

Teacher: Have you told them your ideas about the bus?

Daniel: No (confidently)

Teacher: Why?

Daniel: Because they might think 'oh, I'll do a bigger bus than you' Damon did. *He* thought very hard..

Teacher: And was the bus bigger?

Daniel: Yes, a bigger double decker

Interview 4 November: 48 - 62

He appears to perceive learning as an individual possession which may be poached by others. There is also a concern with quantity as the measure of successful task outcome, which also arises in other tasks, (6) (19). Initially the learning in which Daniel engaged was individual, then shared in a dyadic setting and eventually in a wider community. He was adamant that he chose to work by himself because that was what he wanted. I cite Schutz (1966) who set out a theory of interpersonal behaviour. In this, three areas constitute self-conceptions: the need to feel significant and included, the need to feel competent and in control and the need to feel likeable. In working alone, he protected any feelings of inadequacy in his own knowledge, or possibly his perception of how peers perceive him as a learner or as a friend. Pollard and Filer (1999) write;

Differences in pupils' patterns of strategic action remind us that they can only operate the strategies with which they feel comfortable, which they can manage socially and which are viable and appropriate for them within given structural contexts.

Pollard and Filer 1999: 301

This is true of Daniel. He coped with the task in his own way but did not achieve the intended learning. The objective would be approached again at a later date. When this pattern is repeated in tasks, it may impede learning and the learner would then not be learning at the same rate as his or her peers. This confirms my argument that procrastinating behaviours are detrimental to learning.

The organisation and management of the above task (2) as a collaborative task was altered by Daniel. In complying with his request to work alone, I effectively altered the learning situation for the class, because my attention focused on Daniel. In the next mathematical task (3) Luke is *negotiating* whilst partitioning numbers to total beyond twenty. Daniel strategically *negotiated* his position as lone participant and he managed the reference to light reflection through repeated confirmation of what he had experienced. His creative elaboration may be seen as the way he negotiated with me, his role as learner. Luke in task (3) *negotiated* his approach to the task where no prescription was apparent. In both Daniel's and Luke's task I was in the audience and the negotiation was focused upon my expectation, and how this could, at least in part, be met. In task (1) Luke was expected to access the discourse while engaged on individual outcomes. In this task the intention was that he should work collaboratively using a variety of strategic routes to reach a group solution. Task (1) was judged against a written outcome, a production task, whereas in the following task (3) I intended to remain with the group, participating and assessing the processes by which they would jointly reach the goal.

Luke's *negotiating* was intermittent for most of this task, although at a pivotal point he did achieve '*full participation*' Lave and Wenger, (1991)

p.37. He negotiated his access to the task through strategies which included co-operating, but reaching a conclusion too quickly, observing peers and listening then placing the responsibility for lack of progress upon other group members, and using lengthy written strategies which he may have perceived was teacher valued.

On the day prior to this observation, in response to questioning, he had demonstrated partitioning two separate sets of milk cartons, counting in tens and adding the units to mark the value of the final set. I wished to assess whether he could achieve this independently, or whether my questioning had loaned him procedural strategies. My dual purpose was, first for Luke in discourse with others to interpret the task, assimilating his existing knowledge and skills, and secondly to demonstrate through reflection with others what it was possible for him to achieve, and his role in that. The key objective was to make the appropriate choice of operation and calculation in a two-step word problem.

My **expectancy** of Luke's participation was matched by his expectancy of the task and my role in it. From my perspective, the sustained interaction I planned with the group would facilitate diagnostic assessment. In this task, my intention was to carry out what Torrance and Pryor (1998) call 'divergent assessment'.

It is characterised by more flexible planning, open forms of recording (narrative, quotations etc.) and an analysis of the interaction of the child and the curriculum from the point of view of the child.

Torrance and Pryor 1998 : 154

I assumed my presence would lead to increased motivation. It could equally be construed to give rise to the procrastinating behaviours. The resources I had provided, Dienes apparatus in tens and units, pencil and paper, would also have an expectancy presence of their own. Luke would need to make choices as to how to manage his learning utilising both physical and human resources.

The peer group members were selected on the basis of their existing mathematical attainment and my need to carry out assessment of this new skill. Their social relationships I describe as good although not strong in friendship terms. I introduced the task with reference to Luke successfully totalling thirty six milk cartons on the previous day. I explained I was looking at them together to see how they might solve this problem: 'A milkman has to deliver one bottle of milk to each house in two streets. In one street there are eighteen houses and in the other there are twenty three. How many bottles of milk will he deliver?' As established in the literature, Bennett and Dunne (1992), importance is conferred to different features of the task, through the way it is presented. I believed I had emphasised the collaborative nature of the task. Whether the children interpreted the significance of what I was saying, or whether they chose to pursue their individual methods is difficult to say. The problem was presented in aural mode because I did not wish any group member to be disadvantaged by the level of their reading skills.

Luke, initially receptive, seemed to guess at my intention, then falter as if in expectation of direct instruction.

Luke: ..I know the answer already

Teacher: Go on then

Luke: If the milkman goes to one street and delivers it all, the milk would be.....twenty three..one.... and if.... he would have to deliver twenty three milks

Teacher: Right....if he had to go to both streets?

Luke: Ohhhh...that's going to make a hundred or something

Luke (3): 9-13

The direct instruction was not forthcoming. I intended that Luke would participate in group discussion which would progress from the point at which I introduced the task, at a pace which would keep all involved. In the absence of discussion centred around the problem, there was a need for scaffolding turn-taking and exchange of alternative ideas. In fact as individuals pursued their own courses in rivalry with each other, the

conversation rarely exceeded what Bennett and Dunne (1992) would term 'collective monologue' (p.40).

As the children worked one made tally marks and two wrote the numbers as a sum horizontally, while Luke thought. I checked that he knew the numbers involved. At first he wrote eighty, for eighteen, possibly mishearing. Then he wrote eighty one, reversing the digits. Rachel next to him intervened and they arrived at the right numbers. Ungraciously he placed responsibility for his apparent inactivity, with Rachel. The two were friends, through their mothers' friendships, both at home and in school.

Luke: *She* won't help me because *she* won't use those because that's easier (he says pointing to Rachel's written calculation)

My pivotal response was to suggest he use the Dienes apparatus himself. This changed the collaborative task to an individual task. As the planned co-operation disintegrated he used the apparatus and counted out tens in twos. Not holding the numbers in his head, he became confused and changed strategy.

Luke: Shall I draw the problem?

(Rachel next to him had drawn out the problem as she saw it and had an answer. He drew the milk float, a man and bottles in pairs and ones.).....

This takes a long time (laughing)...

I'm getting sweaty now....

.....

23 and 2,4,6,8,10, 11, 12, 13, 14,15,16...

I'm getting into little bottles now...(indicating he has little space left on the paper).....I'm getting wet now..hot

Luke (3):91-98

I intervened and asked what he thought about the way he was doing it...

Luke: I think it's hard

Teacher: Okay. Is there an easier way?

Luke: No. This is the hardest way

Teacher: So you've chosen the hardest way?

Luke: Yes because I like it hard

Teacher: How can you speed it up, Luke?

Luke (3):102-107

But Luke rejected my concern for pace and in so doing exercised his own powers of control over his learning.

Luke: I can't. I like the hard way because I'm worn out

Teacher: I think I'd be worn out if I'd drawn all those.

What could you do instead?

Luke: Do it in tens

Luke (3): 108-110

He proceeded accurately and reached the correct solution using the Dienes apparatus, then silently worked a similar example. The task had taken forty minutes, yet he quickly arrived at the correct solutions within the last ten minutes of the activity. Luke's procrastinating behaviours had apparently been managed and he seemed conscious of his deliberations. If his intention was to avoid challenge, then this has implications for future learning, for without an analytical approach to tasks, his learning may become instruction dependent. This in turn would lead to a reliance on others and discourage personal control of learning. If his intention was to fill the time allowed for the task, then increasing the pace of tasks by decreasing the time or giving timed targets may reduce the incidence of procrastinating behaviours. Either way, for Luke the audience was important and seemed to maintain the procrastinating behaviours. As with Daniel's task (2) the evidence in this task appears to lend support to my proposal that repeated procrastination is detrimental to learning, and over time is likely to become part of the learning identity.

Bennett and Dunne (1992), referred in the literature to the interplay of social and cognitive intentions in a task. In this task, for Luke, the social demands of collaborative working appeared to outweigh the cognitive. His reluctance to use the apparatus when others appeared not to need it, may have been his way of preserving his intellectual status in the group. I believe he had a naive theory about the psychological interplay of



relationships within that particular grouping which included myself. He understood the potential for manipulating those relationships. Passively participating in the others' efforts may have given him a foothold in scaffolding his own strategic procedures. This supports Rogoff's (1993) notion of *apprenticeship* and Lave and Wenger's (1991) view discussed in the literature review, that participation may be peripheral with degrees of apparent engagement.

In interview, Luke was asked which way he thought was the easiest to solve the problem. He confirmed without hesitation, using the Dienes apparatus. Why then did he want to find the hardest way to do it?

Luke: So it takes longer. So I don't have to do so much work. The faster you do it, the more work you get. When I draw it I have to look at the detail and the glass has got all square shapes so I have to take longer.

Luke: 18.09.98

I frequently ask children to draw, believing this to be an alternative method of recording, and now see I am colluding in their own procrastination.

### **Organisation of tasks in relation to Bennett et al.'s (1984) categories.**

The tasks in my data could be described across the range of categories referred to in the review of the literature. Adopting these categories, as illustrations, task (1) is an *enrichment task* for it was designed to encourage children to use familiar knowledge in new situations, (2) is an *incremental task* where new facts, skills or procedures are introduced, (3) a *restructured task* for I intended Luke should use familiar materials to look at the problem in a new way. The tasks were not planned solely for individuals, and each was subjectively interpreted. In scaffolded intervention (1) became a *practice task*, as did (2) and (3). In most tasks the received curriculum was not the intended curriculum. The potential to reduce the demands of the tasks was taken both on the initiative of the learner, and by the teacher as a coping strategy.

Without discourse or potential for assisted learning within these categories it is difficult to assess where some tasks lie. Andrew (4) was *distracted* at the outset of an *enrichment* task but, following my scaffolding intervention, participated. This scaffolded support reduced the steps of learning for Andrew, making each step a *practice* task as it built on his existing knowledge. Within each task there are subtasks which may determine participation in the whole. For example, Joe (5) expended most effort in locating spellings for the writing which was the focus of the task, yet the overall task was categorised as *practice*. He did not achieve the diary writing, but he did succeed in locating some spellings. The intended learning had others in mind.

The categories are characterised by a concern for observable features, outcomes judged by quantity and overt behaviours. They are sited with the child and ignore the many changing routes to learning. Intervention and assessment in this categorisation are additional processes, not interactive elements in spiralling, reiterative learning. My data provides some evidence (1) of this static view of learning and assessment. which, within the classroom culture, may contribute to the incidence of procrastinating behaviours. Adopting categories for those behaviours would strip the contextual detail from them and reduce the opportunity to reach an understanding of them.

### **Patterns arising in individual and collaborative tasks.**

In the context of this study, patterns emerge in the organisation and management of tasks which may give rise to procrastinating behaviours.

- An emphasis on matching tasks to cognitive ability without due regard for collaborative social and discorsal skills

The tasks were planned with curricula learning objectives in mind, but marginalised the processes by which the objectives could be achieved. Teacher-pupil interactions were often pseudo interactions or became a means of bypassing perceived expectations. The value status of task-related discourse remained implicit.

- Missed opportunities to support through scaffolding (see Bliss et al. (1996)), and task related discourse

In my role as teacher - researcher, and teacher - assessor I allowed the learners some initiative in the direction of the tasks. This allowed them to confirm existing learning, but not to move to new learning. The purpose and potential learning were not explicitly shared. My lack of intervention in Luke's task (3) supports Torrance and Pryor's (1998) findings, that teachers are reluctant to 'teach' in assessment situations. It also signalled my implicit acceptance of his direction.

- Directives from the teacher in asymmetric conversations and the use of resources, which inhibit choice and the mutual scaffolding of learning  
Instructions were given as to task requirements, and the children who procrastinated were not encouraged to enquire. Their behaviours were met with repeated instructions. Responsibility for choice in physical resources was limited, restricting alternative interpretations and ways of proceeding.
- Perceived challenges to personal status from perceived social or intellectual demands

Children who procrastinated were peripheral to the task, and their negotiation into the group was dependent upon the group participants. The interplay of cognitive and social skills among class or group members influenced the success of inclusion. In task (3), Luke's apparent dependency was transferred to the group members, possibly in his belief that they were intellectually more advanced than he in their understanding.

- The cultural knowledge of the classroom led to the belief that individual learning and written outcomes were valued above task related discourse and shared learning

In the absence of support in collaboration, the children resorted to what they perceived as teacher-valued individual outcomes or awaited attention which perpetuated their procrastinating behaviours..

- The relatively weak structural position of the learners was used effectively in their procrastinating behaviours, commanding attention from the teacher

After a range of procrastinating actions, Luke's disclosure on solving the problem set in the collaborative task ((3):188) points clearly to the use of power as cultural knowledge. It is balanced by my failure to locate his learning in the overall picture, effectively keeping the responsibility for learning with the teacher.

The organisation and management of these tasks has rested responsibility upon them which on one hand they are not equipped to take up, and on the other hand they are prevented from taking up because control of their learning is withheld. The way forward is to develop the communicative processes within the class group so that they may mutually support, reflect and develop meta-discoursal skills.

### **Educational implications of task organisation and management.**

This data has given me the opportunity to reflect upon the organisation and management of tasks I devise. It has made me particularly aware of the multi-foci I carry to a task and the importance of marrying the nature of the task to its purpose. The assessments I carry out are very much related to the formal requirements imposed upon me, and as such may blinker me to potential learning which is not the focus of assessment. It has shown me that collaboration in itself is a skill which should become the learning focus of tasks, and that young children have a developing sense of collaboration which reflects and is reflected in class cultural activity.

#### **iv. Creating common understanding.**

The first aspect of the communicative process which is linked to procrastinating behaviours is task organisation and management. In this section I consider the communicative process from the perspective of the children who procrastinate and the teacher, and ask what is communicated that changes children's participatory roles from peripheral, to full and possibly peripheral again.

Procrastinating behaviours may arise, be maintained, reduced or may reoccur in the task learning situation. Whilst the situation defines the behaviours, the responses to those behaviours in part constitute the learning situation. The dynamic interplay of behaviours, co-participant responses, and the learning situation is mediated in the communicative process. Responses to the behaviours are interventions which may be imposed or negotiated, spontaneous or calculated. They may originate in the learner themselves or in the situation. I look at what is communicated in those interventions.

#### **Teacher scaffolding bridges.**

Andrew tells me he prefers working on his own to working with others (Interview 10 March: 19). He adds that he needs help with writing. In task (4) he was asked to write an individual, short story within the theme of 'Journeys', which he would make into a book, to be displayed at a presentation for parents. Overall the task was spread over four sessions, but I focus upon the initial planning and drafting. At the introduction, the group collectively suggested a plethora of ideas to include in their writing, which I left open to choice. When they felt ready, they moved off to collect word books and begin. Eight children, including Andrew, remained on the carpet where the class group had gathered. I talked with these, developing ideas, and five more moved off, including Andrew. I narrowed the potential focus of the task for the three remaining, and they moved off. Andrew's leaving was noted with interest. On the previous occasion he was asked to write, he had rejected the task and support. On this occasion, *distracted*, he walked around the room, shadowing two boys as they collected their books and

pencils. He sat with them, his writing book closed in front of him, his word book distanced in his drawer. As the boys began writing, he slid his chair back, leant his elbows on the table, then swung his chair back and forth. I reminded him to collect his wordbook, at which he got up, glanced in my direction and went back to the seat, initiating conversation with the boys. I returned to him, opened his book and asked how he was going to start. He would draw first because that helped him. After five minutes, and thirty minutes since the introduction of the task, he had drawn a short line on the page. His head was on his elbows resting on the table and he talked to the others as they continued to write. Their attention had been intermittent and I felt they would do more without distraction. I told Andrew to move away and he and I would write together. I contrived the situation and imposed a conversation. I asked what his story was to be about, and he said fluently;

There was a storm tornado. When the tornado swept  
twenty five people died. Fifty thousand people survived.  
They found their houses all broken down and there was  
a mess everywhere. The electricity set fire to the  
buildings. There was water everywhere. They had to  
build their houses all over again.

Andrew (4) : 2

I asked, if the houses had been broken by a tornado, would the people build them in the same way again. He said nothing and I left him to attend to another child. Shortly he approached me with his word book and asked for the spelling 'solid'. He explained unprompted, the people would build solid houses when they rebuilt them. Bruner (1977) said,

How sustained an episode a learner is willing to undergo  
depends on what the person expects to get from his  
efforts.

Bruner 1977:49

In Andrew's case, the distance he needed to travel to achieve what he wanted to say seemed to be too great. He managed his participation to avoid writing, and in removing him, I denied him the opportunity to take responsibility. My action was driven by a desire for an outcome, a product. This also drove the teachers in Bennett et al.'s (1984) study, but is not in

keeping with a social constructivist stance which values discourse and process alongside cognitive development. Either he and his peers were not equipped to conduct a conversation which would alter Andrew's participation in this task, or they did not perceive this as a possibility. The imposed support bridged from his peripheral to full participation in order to produce the intended outcome.

A similar pattern of intervention bridged Joe's participation in a routine diary writing task, but his response to it differed. Joe (5), like Andrew was described as *distracted*, watching whilst his peers wrote. When I checked his progress he had not written anything. Again I judged participation on the expected product. Bennett (1990) warned:

Lack of diagnosis appears to be accompanied by teachers limiting their attention to the products of children's work rather than focusing on the processes or strategies employed by children in arriving at that product. The quality of diagnosis is thereby diminished.

Bennett 1990:721

The product, or lack of it, in this case alerted me to Joe's procrastination and led me to initiate a conversation with him. I believed Joe needed to talk, to share his thinking and access the task. Writing tasks, discussed in the literature review (Alexander 1995, Bennett and Dunne, 1992), appear to demand abstract thinking and as such have high levels of distraction. Writing has potential to be a social activity, but this is dependent on the task and the skills of teachers and learners. My intervention to connect Andrew with the task had been successful in terms of product outcome. Joe's response to my intervention was not successful in those terms, but was more enlightening in terms of understanding the procrastinating behaviours. Andrew clearly knew the expectation, where Joe 'felt his way' constructing understanding from my responses to him. The time allocated to this *practice* task was possibly over generous, if not on this occasion, then historically so, and as Alexander (1995) suggested in the literature, may have contributed to the procrastinating behaviours. Ten minutes into the activity I asked him what he had been doing

Joe: I've been writing people's names down

Teacher: Where?

Joe: **At home**

Teacher: I mean here, now

Joe: **Maths**

Teacher: Where?

Joe: Trying to find my words (picks up his word book)

Teacher: What are you looking for?

Joe: Looking for 'played'

Joe (5):1-9

It took Joe some time to share the intent of my questions. He began writing with a pronounced concern for secretarial skills. My sitting with him brought peers into his learning arena, as they shared their writing with me. This blurred the boundaries between conversation with the teacher and with peers, and contributed to Joe's task efforts. The conversation was mediated through the accomplishments of Joe's peers which they wished to share. Joe acknowledged their curiosity and thanked them explicitly when they helped. Andrew, on the other hand, was unresponsive when I stayed with him, apparently preferring not to be seen receiving help. Joe, like Luke in task (6), seemed to enjoy the social conversation which surrounded my sitting with them.

Luke (6) *negotiated* his participation in writing from peripheral to full, and back to peripheral again. Willing and purposeful in his conversation with peripheral participants, he wrote a new verse for 'London Bridge is falling down', using his scientific knowledge about appropriate materials. He kept up a continual monologue as he grappled with spellings, branching into dialogue when the opportunity to share spellings arose. He passed judgement on others' ideas and engaged my attention. The course to completion was convoluted as he dipped into others' activities without moving from his seat next to me. Whenever he erred in his thinking, I held the direction in mind for his return:



Luke has written 'I wood build IT up' and adds (with)

Teacher: Do you know how to write 'with'?

He shakes his head and puts his finger to his mouth. He fixes his eyes on my face,

Luke: When the colour..the little red one goes past the black one it...

Teacher: What do you mean?

Luke: The little red one moving....(he looks up at the clock) every time it goes past the black one.

Teacher: Right. Do you know how long that takes?

Luke: Don't know

Teacher: How long does it take for the red hand to go round the clock?

Luke: A Minute

Teacher: A minute. You did know. So how many minutes are there around the clock?

Luke: Twelve. (Other children listening say 'no' but do not tell him the right answer, leaving him the opportunity to try again).

Luke (6):1- 10

He used such diversions in conversation, as he had used drawing in the partitioning task, (3).

Time again appeared to play a role in the procrastinating behaviours as it had for Joe (5). Playtime punctuated Luke's writing task (6) just as lunchtime was imminent when he dipped out of procrastination during task (3), the mathematical partitioning task. Listening to Luke in the process of writing illuminated my understanding of the way he paced himself. His deviations, interpreted as challenging the teacher's intention, were procrastinating behaviours. In my efforts to understand these behaviours, I followed his initiatives. Such glimpses of understanding pave the way for suggesting strategies to replace procrastination.

These writing tasks were individual and the bridge from peripheral to full participation was made by teacher and learner negotiating access to each other's thoughts. The intervention was not fleeting, but enduring until the behaviours were bridged. The implications of this for my teaching are that I differentially apportion time to the behaviours, which for some individuals can foster a dependency which maintains the behaviours. My action encroaches upon opportunities for peers to act as scaffolders and in so doing engage in meta-skills.

### **Peers scaffolding bridges.**

The following collaborative tasks have been chosen to illustrate how peers attempt to bridge participation, through both verbal and non-verbal communication. Luke and Joe worked in separate groups engaged on the same task (7). *Distracted*, Luke worked alone without adult or peer intervention. Joe attempted to *negotiate* his access and his status both socially and intellectually. When this appeared unsuccessful I intervened. My interview with him, following the planning stage which was punctuated by lunch time, appeared to be construed by Joe as a supportive intervention.

The class had visited a Children's Gallery and were making a Guide to the Gallery for other classes to use in their literacy hours. Joe perceived the visit as my gift, 'a treat out'. During the visit he had moved impulsively from one activity to the other not waiting to see things through to their conclusion. The writing task followed a 'jigsaw' model, where sub-tasks were allotted following peer discussion. The outcomes of these subtasks would contribute to the group outcome, which in this instance would contribute to the class outcome. When I asked why we were making the book, he answered 'because it's our work'. Joe was grouped with three others, so that the group included a child with secretarial skills, and a child deemed to need additional support. He believed that this grouping was in response to him 'mucking around' the previous day. This shows that what constitutes the class culture permeates Joe's perception of tasks and their purpose.

He took some time to focus on the discussion in his group. When he did, he attempted to establish his status, contributing ideas and assigning himself a non-challenging task:

Joe: There was this golden bone what you pull - you probably didn't see it, but you pull it

Martin: We're doing one thing.....all of us..... most of us agreed we'd do Fantastic Mr Fox and the tunnel....

(The groups are interrupted by a visitor and Joe's attention is taken.)

Joe: Leave me to do the badger.

Martin: No, Robert's doing the badger.

Joe: No, I know....I really know how to colour it. Oi!

Aaron, we're doing the pictures, we colour in and draw.

Joe (7):1-5

In interview with Joe, (Interview (7) October 8), he spoke rapidly in long utterances about what his peers had said and what he had seen at the Gallery. He searched for words and used non-specific language to overcome his difficulty, such as 'lifter' for handle. I then referred to the task. He seemed not to know what the others in his group planned to do, but he would draw because, he told me, Martin had given him that task. This would confirm Cohen et al.'s (1990) view that in mixed status groups the low status members' contribution may be overlooked.

Returning to the task, I stayed with the group working collaboratively with the exception of Joe. He began colouring without talking. When I got up to leave, Joe left too. When I returned he came back, pulling his seat tight in under him. My presence seemed to curtail any discussion amongst the other group members, who then focused on their individual tasks. In addition, as in Luke's tasks (1) (3), it brought with it a dependence which relinquished control of learning to the teacher.

Luke remained on the periphery of his group. The children were writing a non-fiction contribution to the book, a section on the Light Gallery. Luke sat with a library book in front of him, arms folded across the book. He

stared ahead with a sulky expression, but did not move. Occasionally, he swung back on his chair, and spoke to children in the neighbouring group, without facing them. In interview I asked what his job in the group was.

Luke: I had to find more about shadows..I had to write it down....I *should* have writed it down then I don't have to speak to them they can just read what I wrote down what I was going to say and they will do...will d...that's what...they will find out about shadows.

Teacher: And do you know why you were doing shadows?

Luke: Yes b..be...because that was Kelly's idea

Teacher: Why did Kelly chose shadows?

Luke: Because it's interesting.....

Teacher: Did you find anything in your book about shadows?

Luke: **Kelly** was interested in it

Teacher: You weren't?

Luke: I was a little bit

Luke (7):1-9

In contrast to his lack of conversation with his peers, he continued talking at length about the visit to the Light Gallery, fixing me with his eyes, monopolising the time. Luke apparently missed a sense of ownership of this task. He was interested in the subject as he showed in our conversation. However, he appeared to shrink from negotiating his participation, particularly with Kelly, who was perceived by others as a dominant member of the group. His possible anxiety and lack of self-confidence within this particular grouping may have contributed to this.

In a writing task which had similar demands (8), an excerpt from which is in Appendix A, he was observed **conforming**. On this occasion he had chosen and been accepted, to work with a peer of high intellectual and social status within the group. Whilst his application to the task was intermittent, Martin's verbal and non-verbal communication seemed to draw him back to the task. Occasional eye contact, a light touch on the

hand, seemed to keep the two working at a pace to ensure they would reach the second stage of the task, peer evaluation, together.

In these writing tasks, although there has been an explicit expectation of talk, true collaboration has not featured, primarily because of the individual nature of the expected outcomes. My data confirms research findings with regard to talk and collaborative working. Galton et al.'s (1980) found that children worked *in* groups not *as* groups. Bennett et al. (1984) analysed group talk, finding that only sixteen percent of the recorded talk was task enhancing, even if task related. The data also lends support to the view that discussion is not valued amongst primary children as a medium for learning,

-there is a perception that learning (through discussion) in school can occur only in a situation in which the teacher is not only present, but involved in the discussion, and that pupils cannot learn much from each other.

Hall 1995:25

For those children I study, participation in talk in the tasks described has not been sustained. During the interventions, long utterances have proven in the main to be diversions, whilst the pseudo-talk of negotiation towards a task outcome did not enhance opportunities to develop ideas and see thoughts through.

Procrastinating behaviours alter the pace of progress from the introduction of the task, and this is an additional obstacle to children's inclusion in group discussion. Access to collaborative effort for the procrastinator may be mediated by the co-participants, using both verbal and non-verbal communication. On occasions, children who procrastinate can themselves negotiate access for others.

Joe and Gary both **conform** in this task, but Joe manages the participation of Gary. A drama (9), focused on '*A Quiet Night In!*' by Jill Murphy, took place as part of the literacy hour, small group work. Engaged in 'guided

reading', I devised the task so that the children worked without input and with minimum monitoring from the teacher. Hence the co-participants were responsible for scaffolding the task internally. Gary and Joe's group were reminded of the activity the previous day, when children had enacted a literal interpretation of the story so far. They were asked to devise a new interpretation of a play with the theme, 'A birthday surprise'. There was some class discussion around the theme of parties and some suggestion from peers as to which direction they might take. The aim was to produce an impromptu short play with a beginning, middle and end. The objectives were that they should work co-operatively and communicate the story to the class audience with clarity of speech or mime.

Joe took control of the situation, gathering all his group members around him, including Gary. He said he had a plan and began assigning characters and words to different children. There was some discussion as he allowed space for them to offer their suggestions, but he looked pleased when they appeared to accept his ideas. Joe gathered props and directed children. Ostensibly, the developing play closely resembled the story read.

After fifteen minutes the class gathered for the performance. Joe continued to take the lead, signalling movements. He opened the play, miming effectively and showing good attention to detail. Gary shadowed him, imitating. At his line he was inaudible and the audience said in unison that they could not hear. Joe continued with the action moving it on as Gary shadowed him. Throughout he maintained close eye contact with him, ignoring three other participants. As Joe spoke, Gary trailed the words and imitated his movements. This worked well until the audience realised there were then two cakes being made, and in fact everything was happening twice. The audience was amused and looked at me to show it had noticed, but appeared to take my cue of non-intervention and continued to follow the presentation. Joe maintained the sequence of the text as it was in the story. He left a space for Gary to act independently, indicating that he should put the candles on the imaginary cake. Gary appeared not to understand that the imaginary cake was part of the story, and asked

quizzically, 'candles?'. He did nothing. Joe took him by the jumper to pull him in the right direction towards the imaginary cake.

At this point Joe appeared to take a director's role, cueing another child in as Dad. Gary followed Joe's movements and then appeared concerned about the candles. His delayed action was accommodated by the other actors. Joe directed the Dad to blow out the candles and take them off the cake, which was cut and shared by all participants. The audience applauded at which point the learning support assistant came into the room. Gary went directly to her and animatedly began a conversation. She reported that Gary had recounted what Joe and he had just done.

In evaluation time, children praised Joe for his pivotal role in the play and one child noted that Gary was following his lead. Gary, on receiving this, strained his neck forward, looked directly at the child concerned, spun round on one heel and back to the audience again without comment.

In interview Gary was aware that Joe had not complied with the instruction as it was set out on the planning sheet;

Teacher: When I said it was time to start the activities,  
what did I ask you to do?

Gary: To look on the plan....but *he* didn't

Interview March 3: 13-14

Although apparently aware that the task had other requirements (their own interpretation of a surprise party), he had not asserted himself during the task. He did assert his part in the play, if confusedly.

Teacher: I watched you do your play about the party

Gary: (quick to interrupt) I did all about the audience

Joe: I did all that! You just copied

Gary: No

Joe: You did. I did all the making the..

Gary: I made the cake too

Interview March 3: 1-6

Joe seemed to understand his reference to the audience, although it was not shared by myself. Possibly, Joe anticipated a meaning which coincidentally kept the conversation moving. Gary's eagerness to assert himself over the past events was not equalled when invited to project his thoughts

Teacher: If you made up a play about a party, what would you need to think about?

Joe: Who you are going to be.....(to Gary) What was you thinking ?

Gary: Mmmmm (pause of six seconds)

#### Interview March 3: 7-9

Joe seemed to feel he was cutting Gary out of the conversation and engineered a space to allow him to contribute, possibly a recognition of his equal status. In response to direct questions concerning abstract thought, Gary remained silent and could not be drawn to respond. The increased time for response appeared to make him uncomfortable and he fought to keep back tears. Once released from the situation he seemed to shed the anxiety.

Gary's contradictory behaviour indicated dependence yet assertiveness in interview. He seemed to have difficulty sharing the same abstract imagery, but Joe maintained a level of participation for him. Gary seemed to think following Joe *was* the task and in this he was successful. In the Vygotskian paradigm he was seen as moving from the social to the psychological plane. He seemed to be conforming to his own rules of behaviour. The audience's reaction when he shadowed to make a second cake (with a few moments time delay) indicated their awareness that he was not conforming in keeping with their expectations. Their conceptualisation of the task was different to Gary's, and his interview assertion that he 'did it all' seemed to indicate that he did not see his performance in relation to others.

Gary appeared unaware that his own behaviour was not meeting teacher or peer expectation, yet he was quick to point out in interview, that Joe had not complied with instructions. He focused on the features of the task with which he felt confident, and replicated as opposed to extended his learning



goals. As in Daniel's light reflection task (2), it was his peers that promoted access to the interaction, and encouraged participation in the world of his peers. This was the side-by-side participation that Rogoff (1993) called 'guided participation'. Gary in participating appropriated the actions of Joe and co-participants, and this involvement is part of his coming to know, a preparation for *apprenticeship* or activity in the community. He appeared to participate in the community, but not as a participant of the community. This shows that there are several routes to understanding in addition to scaffolding in a dyadic setting.

Collaboration was essential to the successful outcome of this task. This demands an adjustment in thinking on the part of two or more members of the group, but Gary's engagement seemed not to go beyond imitation. Joe's apparent command of the situation left space for Gary to operate as an individual. Manke (1997) says, 'There was a lot of space around the edges of adult attention, and students used that space.' (p.119). I suggest that small groups working together are micro-communities within the class community, and as such the participants renegotiate their roles within that community. Again spaces form around the edge, and Gary found this space to use in his own way. The organisation of the task allowed him the opportunity to be seen participating and to maintain his self esteem and motivation for future activity, judged in his own terms.

On the evidence of the tasks so far described, it would seem that peers can be instrumental at bridging the gap from non-participant to participant status. The conversation with Rachel prompted Luke to devise his own strategy of solving the mathematical problem in task (3). Martin and Luke sharing their drawings in the light exploration task (2) encouraged Daniel to move from the familiar to explore. Joe tugged Gary in to position keeping him within the action (9). In these tasks both teacher and peer actions are reactive interventions. They are the efforts to return the learner to the intended path, within the context of that task. They are short lived and their effects short term. As such the patterns which emerge inform understanding

on the path to suggesting longer term strategies which will replace the procrastinating behaviours.

The common features of these observations and interviews suggest teachers and learners may jointly reduce the incidence of procrastinating behaviours, by intervention which:

- Explicitly locates the assigned task in previous and potential learning.
- Seeks to confirm the sense made of the assigned task through discussion of the task demands and ways to proceed.
- Makes explicit the ground rules for participation and teacher and learner expectancies.
- Fosters the value and skills of collaboration and discussion as a means of creating common understanding.
- Involves the learners in establishing criteria by which learning will be judged.
- Develops self-regulating strategies which support the working consensus of the class group.

In considering the second research question

- In individual and group collaborative assigned tasks, what are the possible links between communication and procrastinating behaviours?

I believe the learners' interpretation of what is communicated and its meaning for themselves in terms of their learning identity, interests, perceived intellectual abilities and expectancies, is strongly linked to procrastinating behaviours. Each learner has exercised power, observable in the behaviours recorded, themselves a powerful symbol of managing their interpretation when others around them are suspending or following theirs. What is communicated may be what is said. It may come directly from the task instructions, the content of ensuing learning conversations, feedback or assessment strategies. It cannot however be exclusively located in the task, for it may be tacit. The socio-historical perspectives in the learning situation interplay. If the communicative process is adequately supportive, then the subjective interpretations of the task requirements may be shared with the task setter which opens up new learning opportunities. However,

the complexity of setting single focus tasks for multiple audiences, each bringing their previous experiences to bear, renders this difficult at the least.

The communicative process also determines how subjective interpretations are formed. At one and the same time it loans access to the learner's understanding and equips him or her to be receptive. By intervention at the site of the behaviours, by peer or teacher, learners may be set upon the intended course. In the intervention the expectation of the learner's contribution to the task is altered, for control passes or is taken from the learner to the teacher. The procrastinating behaviours are symbolically linked to what is communicated, what is understood or misunderstood, interpreted or misinterpreted, worthwhile and status enhancing.

### **The educational implications of procrastinating behaviours linked to the communicative process.**

In the context of this study, reactive interventions by peers or teacher encourage learners to participate but that participation is shared. It is not achieved without mutual adjustment. In this argument, to pursue tasks to fulfil teacher learning intention can never be fully achieved, for in each act of constructing common meaning, adjustments are made. Tasks were ongoingly altered by the learner to confirm existing knowledge, and by the teacher in terms of expectation of the individual. Focus on the product of the task in fact masked the processes the learners were engaging in to signal that they were out of tune with their peers. Whilst it appears superficially that the learners have met the intention, further reflection shows this was not so. The learner continues to feel he or she has met expectation with reduced responsibility. This has implications for the **power and control** exercised in the learning situation, and for **assessment, questioning, feedback and praise**. The observations of procrastinating behaviours for these particular learners have in the process altered them, for they are now better understood and will be interpreted differently. My response to them is change and they are changing in response. Where task intervention is product oriented, teachers may be colluding in the **perpetuation** of

procrastinating behaviours. Yet to move from reactive to planned intervention, it is necessary to move beyond the observable product oriented behaviours to the processes which dispose a learner to participate. It is here the enduring events that are the histories of teachers and learners come together, and change here will have a lasting effect. Within this arena lie the constitution of learning identities, teacher's and learners' use of power in the teaching, learning and assessment cycle. This leads me to consider what strategies will take the place of procrastinating behaviours, increasing participation.

#### **v. Learning identities.**

My third research question asks

- What are the relationships between individual learning identities and procrastinating behaviours?

The influence of learning identities has already been highlighted in discussion of the sociocultural phenomena which surround procrastinating behaviours. These behaviours are, as this data shows, strategic coping strategies which amongst other things, preserve personal status, avoid challenge and manipulate power. They emanate from and feed recursively into learning identities, which emerge and change. As discussed by Pollard and Filer (1999), referred to in the literature review, these identities are formed through children's experiences in relation to learning and the social setting of classrooms. Further evidence is needed of what in the communicative process in this study may constitute those identities. The following tasks give unsolicited references to the way the children perceive themselves as learners. Whilst the information itself is important, so too are the circumstances which prompted the disclosure. Data from interviews provides solicited perceptions of themselves in relation to the learning context, their control and status.

#### **Contextual relations.**

During a mathematical task (10), Daniel was asked to interpret a number story (source Womack (1988) p.77) and suggest appropriate operations to use on his way to solving the written problem. He had been absent when the

class worked on a similar task, and I wished to assess his understanding in order to include him within an existing group. I intended to begin with a simple problem, and contingent upon his understanding, to increase in complexity, modelling the adaptations he would need to make. As he became familiar with the strategy, I would reduce the degree of support until he could work alone. With the class away, we worked at a table using an array of multilink for counting purposes, and using the written problems. Immediately Daniel took control of reading the problem for himself.

Sarah collects mice, beetles and snakes and she loves counting them. She always likes to count the numbers of legs and heads of the little animals in her collection. Sarah has one beetle and one mouse, how many legs is that? (beetles have six legs)

Womack 1988: 77

He decoded proficiently, but reread without prompting. He persevered until he had a working understanding of what was required. As in the light reflection task (2), he took the initiative and adapted the task requirements to his own interests, confirming his existing knowledge. He used the multilink to represent the legs of the creatures and wove stories around the characters as he worked.

Daniel: I'm a bit of a smartypants because I can do this

Teacher: So what have you found out?

Daniel: The secret one is ten

Teacher: What does that mean?

Daniel: That, if we put the mouse to the beetle and if the beetle's frightened and he flies away, then there's only the mouse left...that's four, and if the mouse doesn't like being lonely, Sarah has to come in and give it some cheese...and if it doesn't like any at the moment then the mouse goes away and then there's none left, and if the beetle decides to come back and the mouse comes back and the beetle apologises for flying away, then the mouse comes up, then we're up to 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10.

Daniel (10): 88-96

Daniel continued with these lengthy utterances working his own problems.

When I asked what he had learned in doing the task, he replied,

Daniel: I learned that you should leave wild animals and  
if one of them is your pet, you should keep them in a big  
cage with a tree.

Interview (10): 30

Although he appeared confident in his ability, working ‘..because I want to get smart’, he was not yet skilled in objectively identifying what he had learned or what he already knew. He provided an answer which was meaningful to him. Apparently unchallenged in terms of the task objective, he re-routed the task to take the time he felt was available. This strategic adaptation was a feature of Daniel’s tasks.

Writing a story (11), he was observed to engage intermittently. The task had similar product oriented demands to Andrew’s (4), Joe’s (5) and Luke’s (6). Within the time allowed he had written sentences, and rewritten them to no apparent purpose. After the task in interview, I asked how he had spent his morning.

Daniel: I was thinking of a good story. ...Is it all right if I  
wrote ‘the magic chair saw an elephant with me?’....

(this in fact was not the story he wrote)....

Teacher: What do you think of the story you did this  
morning?

Daniel: It’s really good. Really, really good.

Teacher: (I read aloud what he had written) ‘A forty  
hotel and a posh chair very very posh chair in hotel the  
magical posh hotel end’ What do you think of that now  
you’ve heard me reading it?

Daniel: Very perfect.

(I asked about an identical page he had written but  
crossed out. He explained that was what he did but he  
‘stopped his pencil before it made any more mistakes’.)

Daniel (11): 2-6

His confidence was reinforced by ability to turn tasks to his own interests. However, when tasks required more than individual effort, he appeared to shrink from the challenge, retiring in group tasks. He chose to work alone in the reflected symmetry and light task (2). In a collaborative problem solving task (12), he appeared to experience the same difficulties in negotiating his acceptance in the group as Luke had in task (7), writing the Gallery Guide. Interestingly, Kelly, perceived by others as a dominant group member, was also in Daniel's group on this occasion. His strategically adaptive responses to learning contexts are based on choice, as referred to by Pollard and Filer (1999), in the review of literature. In his behaviours he is compared to Robert in the same literature. Those behaviours are fostered by my responses to him: allowing him to take initiative in direction of a task, allowing him to be first to 'instruct' a novice in the use of an IT program (20), allowing him to work alone when he made the choice.

Unlike Daniel, Joe appeared most confident in group tasks which could be interpreted more freely. He showed this in the drama task with Gary (9) and again in a science task, where children were set the problem to explore and explain what happened when air was excluded from a candle flame, (13). He brought his everyday knowledge into play, relating it to the fire safety talk they had recently heard. The objectives of the task were to conjecture, reason and demonstrate before recording pictorially. Only after several false hypotheses from his peers, did he contribute to the introduction of the task, then he did so succinctly: 'The flame needs air to keep burning.' When the children dispersed to experiment, he did not sit, but stood authoritatively, telling those nearby what he was doing and what they should do. He left his work, walking around the groups 'advising' them what they should do. Occasionally he would chaperone children to me and wait in the background as I spoke with them. By his actions he turned a task devised to provide individual outcomes into a community task. Joe's confidence in his knowledge in this task lent him kudos and status in his estimation. Learning identities closely interweave with the use of power

and control, and in the forthcoming section I show how his action in this task stands in contrast to his concern for perceived classroom values.

**Personal control.**

In the literature referred to earlier, Biggs (1990) suggests that anxiety in tasks leads to superficial learning. Gary appears anxious in the tasks in this study and my response to that apparent anxiety is to support, reducing the complexity of the tasks, perhaps unnecessarily. His performance in the drama task (9), was judged in his own terms. His apparent satisfaction indicated that his ‘failure’ was in the situation and his learning identity appeared, in this case, unchallenged. Yet the audience reaction to him was reserved. They collectively looked round at me when it was clear that he was imitating, not interpreting. In the critical evaluation that followed the performance, when he was referred to personally, he took up a threatening stance then spun round on the spot, avoiding physically facing the challenge. He controlled his involvement in the task, and his peers accommodated him.

In interview I asked him what he did when he was unsure what he was expected to do. He replied that he asked me, but this was not borne out in my experience. He did acknowledge the conventions of the classroom without drawing attention to himself and did not persist. It is my responsibility to reach him, but he appears reluctant to be found, hiding in conformity. I asked,

Teacher: What might happen if you put your hand up (to contribute to class discussion)

Gary: Don’t know.....

.....

Teacher: What do you guess might happen?

Gary: Get it wrong

Interview March 10: 89 - 94

In his view ‘getting it wrong’ was most likely and to be avoided, thus maintaining the identity he wished to preserve. In all the interviews the children claimed to be proactive in seeking help or clarifying



understanding, if there was a fear of 'being wrong'. Favoured peers or the teacher were the preferred ways of securing help. The peers were selected for their knowledge status by Luke, their friendships by Gary, Joe and Andrew. Daniel claimed to have recourse to the teacher only. Risking failure was important to maintaining personal control.

### Status.

Luke spontaneously called to me, 'I know why you watch us, because we do good work.' He was engaged on a writing task with Martin, (9). Together they were devising descriptions of Aunt Sponge and Aunt Spiker from Roald Dahl's book, *James and the Giant Peach*. The partnership worked well and both agreed they would chose to work together on another occasion, 'we just got on well'. Partnership status appeared to effectively shore up the status of children who were perhaps insecure. Luke's mother's assessment of him would confirm what this data suggests,

He's so slow. He seems to cling to things he thinks he can do, he's not one for trying things different, 'I don't know whether I can do it or not, so I won't bother trying it.' I think that is what is in his mind.

Field notes: 17 October. (Luke's mother)

Working with Martin offered Luke status in his own eyes and in those of his peers. This personal status in managing a working relationship was evident in the following extract. Joe called across to me, when I worked with Gary (19), that he and Aaron were 'sharing ideas'. I asked what he meant by that, because he had replayed my words from the previous day. 'It's when we talk to one another, not stopping each other, just sharing.'. The fact that he brought my attention to it has again to do with values and power, but also the status of the individuals in achieving this method of working.

Andrew was observed **disrupting** the efforts of a group of children in an art task, which involved observational drawing of light and shade using coloured pencils, (14). In interview he appeared to anticipate my questioning: what was the task, why were we doing it, for how long? He

initiated reference to the procrastinating behaviours which disrupted, yet he did not see himself as the instigator.

Andrew: I just snatched my...said can I borrow red.....

Teacher: So you didn't hold on to the colours at all?

Andrew: No, .....pushed them everywhere

Teacher: You didn't stop other people using them?

Andrew: No because everybody needed the colours after me

#### Andrew (14): 1-5

This contradicted my observations, and those of the assistant in the classroom. He presented the situation as one in which he was delayed by the actions of others. In this task his 'primary-interests-at-hand' (Pollard 1985) protected his dual status. He managed the contradictory cultural forces that Pollard and Filer (1999) suggested threaten peer status. He tried to meet my expectations whilst not conforming to academic expectations. In a problem solving task (12) connected to the history topic of Norman castles, he was expected to work collaboratively to solve the following problem; 'If there were a fire in the baron's hall of a motte and bailey castle, how could they get the river water from the bottom of the hill, to the fire?' Andrew was instrumental in the successful outcome of his small group. Paradoxically, in the task where he worked well, he barely acknowledged his role. In areas where he knew his own competencies, he did not need to protect his status, nor did he wish to appear to be conforming to academic expectation..

In response to my third research question

- What are the relationships between individual learning identities and procrastinating behaviours?

this evidence shows that those identities, formed by experiences in learning situations, may promote or reduce the procrastinating behaviours. The 'primary-interests-at-hand' (Pollard 1985) that those behaviours are set to protect, are the key to reducing them. The patterns that emerge show children's learning identities may dispose them to procrastinate if

- responses to them in learning situations are ambiguous
- social demands for maintaining status outweigh the academic status to be gained
- anxiety and risk within a task is too great
- the strategies to deal with uncertainty are not within their repertoire
- their motivation to participate is low
- their personal control is challenged or relinquished

The insights gained through this data point to the value of observation and interview for understanding the child's perspective. This carries with it a warning from my data, that children effectively read what is in the teacher's mind. An example of this was in the responses to questions concerning what they did when they had difficulty. They gave what they perceived as the required answer. The classroom culture is mutually constituting and spiralling, and as such echoes the behaviours and discourse which constitute it.

### **The educational implications of procrastinating behaviours for learning identities.**

The apparent conscious nature of the observed procrastinating behaviours seems to indicate that they may have endured for some time, and become part of the individual's coping repertoire. This study has given me the opportunity to monitor the incidence of these behaviours, and through interview develop a profile for individuals. This seems essential in identifying which behaviours are designed to avoid challenge and which indicate difficulties experienced, although the two are not mutually exclusive.

It would seem that strategies which share a distribution of power might replace procrastinating behaviours. These include engaging in task-related discourse which hands control back and forth, models turn-taking and promotes self-efficacy. Such strategies may be peer or teacher lead, so the social composition of groupings as well as the cognitive competencies is important.

## **vi. Power.**

Inextricably linked with learning identities is the use of power as control over others, and control with others. Somewhere between the two lies potential for replacing procrastinating behaviours. In the review of literature, I focused upon questioning, its role in maintaining teachers' agendas, its social and cognitive role including assessment. Through my data, I illustrate the use of power in the classroom culture, and address the question,

- In the recursive sequence of teaching, learning and assessment, what role does the distribution of power play in the incidence of procrastinating behaviours?

### **Teachers' and pupils' agendas.**

Teachers and pupils pursue agendas which are constantly adapting in response to changing situations. Pupils may overtly challenge the teacher agenda, as described by Manke (1997) in the review of literature, or may covertly pursue a hidden agenda as Luke did. In the literacy hour, he managed his partial participation, following his own agenda in parallel with the student teacher's. As she read *The Rainbow Fish* by Mark Pfister, with the class (15), he wriggled. In twenty five minutes he only momentarily glanced at the book when a new picture came into view.

Luke studies the back of his hand then looks up at the picture. He continues to rock on his knee. His neighbour answers a question. He looks and yawns then sways side to side looking in the direction of the book. Both feet go up on his seat. He swings his feet down to the floor, rocks, stands, sits.

Field notes: Luke 17 November

His intermittent attention sufficed on this occasion. He thought aloud in response to the illustrations, but not in response to the teacher's questioning. Luke was familiar with the book which was treated as a novel experience within an asymmetric learning situation. He appeared aware of his role in the community of learners. When the student teacher asked, 'Who is ready?' he put his hand up, then crossed his arms in an exaggerated

fashion across his chest. This was rewarded, for his group was first chosen to move to the group activities and he was released. He read the culture of the classroom and had watched and listened to the teacher's responses to behaviours. 'Alan, don't fuss.' he called into the air, but did not watch to see if the message was received. He appeared consciously selective in his behaviours, at the same time as **conforming**. From his perspective he was successful in the task; this success was marked by the teacher rewarding his social compliance and unwittingly collaborating in his procrastinating behaviours.

In the small group task that followed, Luke was asked to draw what he expected to find in the sea. He had his own book and worked alone, seated in the group of six children. He began immediately with a running commentary to nobody in particular. He **explained** his drawing simply, - 'a shark' - when a neighbour indicated she was not clear what he had drawn. In eight minutes he was satisfied that he had fulfilled the task requirements. When I questioned him about his behaviour in the earlier part of the literacy session, he was quick to account for himself;

Teacher: What were you doing when we were  
looking at the Big Book

Luke: waiting

Teacher: waiting for what?

Luke: waiting for it to end

Teacher: Why?

Luke: so I can get home quickly. I have to fix my remote control car. The engine came out. I have to fix it...fix it...fix it. My Dad helps. I took the lid off and put it back but it came out again. Maybe I'll bring it to school and show the children when I have done it works by battery.

Luke: 17.11.97

These words were spoken with a rush of enthusiasm and amounted to more than he had uttered in the course of completing the task. Furthermore, the opening led to more discourse between us which extended into playtime. It was not relevant to the assigned task, but lent insights into activities which

were significant for Luke. He conformed and complied with the task requirements, yet his interests were outside the task.

Luke's agenda in this incident ran in parallel with the teacher's, but conflicted with teacher expectation that he should read aloud with the class. His procrastinating behaviours in the partitioning task (3), judged on his departing comment that he worked slowly to avoid more work, intentionally disrupted the teacher's agenda. The tasks themselves, their organisation and management allowed him to do this. To manage his procrastinating behaviours in this way demanded a working knowledge of what constituted the classroom culture.

Daniel's imaginative alterations to the tasks to accommodate his own world realities are individual to him within the group of children studied. It has been suggested (for example Manke 1997) that children piece together fragments of the curriculum to make them holistically meaningful in terms of their experiences. The ease with which this comes about exerts a power and influence over the intended learning, which could challenge the authority of that learning. Spaulding (1997) says

..second grade students have the ability to determine goals, to perceive goal compatibility, to select and use political strategies, and to evaluate the consequences of those strategies in terms of goal achievement.

Spaulding 1997: 117

Daniel appeared adept at this. Whilst I make the assumption he was procrastinating, one possibility was that he was engaging in alternative routes to reach a goal which was more compatible with his liking or interests. A second possibility is that Daniel did not share the intended meaning conveyed in the language of the task. An interview following the science/mathematical task (2) showed Daniel first adopting the language I used to fulfil his institutional role, then shared communication breaking down despite his best efforts.

Teacher: Good ..and what did we find out?

Daniel: (without hesitation) We found that if the light was shining on the bus stop light, then we would see a reflection of the bus.

Teacher: Where?

Daniel: On the glass of the bus stop

Teacher: Can you tell me where you mean?

Daniel: Yes.. If you... if you go down the hill...and then you go to the bottom and then you see someone that wants to get on the bus and you see a reflection in the glass.

#### Interview Daniel (2) : 9 - 14

Daniel adopted my language, 'we found out' but in fact it was only I who found this out, he already knew. The conversation went on to show the importance of shared situational sense. It was my intention on asking 'Where?' to return his thinking to the mirrors, but uppermost in his mind was the situation which gave rise to his experience. Procrastinating behaviours have much to do with 'words that go astray' (Bruner 1996).

Gary in the drama task (9) appeared not to be assertive and to wish to conform, yet his performance itself challenged the established norms of the classroom. His limited interaction with peers and teacher lead to the translation of his ideas in others' terms, so that he was nominally responding to what possibly was not his intention. Power and control were appropriated and handed to and fro, yet somehow it was uncertain whose agenda was being followed.

#### **The socio-cultural growth of power.**

Some features of classroom culture are perceived by learners as resistant to challenge and these become part of the 'working consensus' which allows teachers to teach and pupils to learn. The following observations have been selected to show how children perceive that work is valued as a product. That product is ideally achieved in an individual setting, without the distraction of talk, is of an acceptable quantity and neat presentation.

During the diary task (5) Joe walked around the room, an onlooker to others' work. I asked him to show me what he had done. He collected his book open at a blank page, some fifteen minutes into the task. 'I'm naughty' he said, before handing the book to me. 'Why do you say that?' I asked. His reply was, 'Because I haven't done anything yet.' Joe's self-image demanded that he should produce the seemingly appropriate quantity of writing for it to be accepted, and for he himself to be accepted. When children shared their writing, Joe read a short sentence and said 'I don't normally put a full stop there and I don't normally do it neat.' This concern for neatness was echoed in two other tasks. First, during a PE task (16) taken by the student teacher, I had observed him following his own agenda, apparently pursuing some sort of karate type routine. Back in the classroom he was changing and approached me to tell me he and his friends were going to play Dennis the Menace at playtime. I asked how they played it, to which he replied, 'Well you can play it neatly, you can play it beautifully.' From where did his interpretation of how to please stem? We did not know each other well at this stage, so was it something he had brought to school with him, or something from his previous school experience as is suggested in the literature (Pollard 1999). It arose again as I observed him playing a game with large construction toys, (17). He reached for a small table and said:

Joe: Louis, we don't jump on this, all right? (referring to the table). Louis, we've got to make this. Louis, we don't jump on this, Mrs.H and Miss H don't want us to. Louis we need some more bits.

Louis: Yeah, build a Street Shark on it. (He collected some more pieces)

Joe: We don't jump on this ....like tread.....I, we don't tread.

Joe (17): 3-5

The two meandered from parallel play to co-operative play, but when Louis suggested he could pretend to fight him, Joe declined, saying, 'I don't like fighting very much', at which Louis went off to fight himself! Joe kept him in sight and once again drew him back into his play, refuelling a vehicle at



the North Pole. Joe collected the table again saying assertively, ‘You do not sit on here’, at which Louis collected a chair for him to sit on. Joe cleaned the seat (which was not dirty) and the two played on.

Joe was concerned with quantity and outward appearance. When I observed him working collaboratively with two others on a poetry task, (18), he did not appear to contribute much to the language, but organised pencils, rubbers and word books for others. When I asked if his group poem was finished, he seemed to interpret my meaning to be that there was not sufficient quantity there. So how would he know when it was finished? When the whole page was covered. There was a tension between Joe’s procrastinating behaviours and his concern for quantity.

In a writing task (8) Luke, worked with Martin, who on other occasions he had claimed would make him work faster. On this occasion, Luke claimed, he did not really sit *with* Martin. He was just sitting there and then Martin was sitting next to him. This is construed to mean that Luke wished to deflect any forthcoming censorship of collaborative working. In interview he had been looking at photographs of children working in the classroom, and was talking about whether they were working or not. He seemed to deduce that a group was not working, simply by who the members were. ‘What would help them work better?’ I asked. To which he replied, ‘err working on their own ..and when it’s quiet.’ Luke and Joe both seem to bear out Manke’s (1997) observation,

In many cases student’s acceptance of that institutional role will be part of the baggage they carry to school and will be actualized in their actions in the classroom, increasing the teacher’s ability to shape power relationships as they are constructed and revised.

Manke 1997: 131

Luke and Joe seemed to have an individualistic view of learning, based on the transmission of knowledge, a view they had brought with them to school which had not been disconfirmed. The criteria Luke referred to, of

working alone, of quantity, quiet, and neatness had not wittingly been made explicit in the tasks, but were drawn from the class routines and culture to become part of the norm of behaviour as perceived by others, promoted by praise and reward. Torrance and Pryor (1998) write;

The children .....are still young. Their experience of what constitutes good work is limited, and their capacity to differentiate between difficulty, ability and effort is, at the least, underdeveloped. The availability of an easy way of telling whether or not work is good through the giving or withholding of extrinsic rewards means that they are not encouraged to think about criteria in a principled way.

Torrance and Pryor 1998 : 105

In the context of this study, reward and censorship are delivered through verbal evaluative comments. The audience for these comments is wider than the intended recipient and they may be freely interpreted. Like the tasks themselves, they may not meet the teacher intention. It has been written in the literature review (Rowe, 1994, Wearmouth, 1997) that rewards are frequently awarded from the adult perspective and can lead to conformity, fostered by praise. Equally, as with Andrew, praise may be threatening when the pupil is struggling to maintain a dual status.

Interventions in these tasks have rested upon 'polite requests' and indirect discourse. It has been suggested (for example Manke, 1997) that teachers use these forms of direction in order to blur the edges between the structural positions of teachers and learners. I describe 'inviting' Andrew to move from his group, but he recognised this as a direction and acted upon it. I 'invited' Daniel (2) to tell me what he was doing and sat down beside him. His response to this was to take command of the questioning and nomination of turn-taking in the conversation we shared. Such polite requests suggest a share in power or a shift in responsibility from teacher to learner. They, like reward and censorship, are open to interpretation.

### **Power in assessment.**

Gary was closed to questioning from peers and adults alike, so wielded powerful control over what could or could not occur. Formative assessment could only be based upon partial understanding of what he allowed me to see. I was seeking to understand his expectations of school....

Teacher: You said when you look forward to coming to school you like working. Then you said you play in the playground. Is there a difference between work and play?

Gary: (6 seconds pause) Yes

Teacher: Can you tell me what the difference is?

Gary: (9 seconds pause) No

Teacher: Can you tell me something that is work? (10 seconds pause) Is reading work? (nods) Is maths work? (nods) Can you tell me anything else that is work?

Gary: (indistinct)

Teacher: say it again please..

Gary: English

Teacher: Is that writing?

Gary: Yes

Teacher: What's play?

Gary: playing games

Teacher: How are they different then?

Gary: (10 seconds pause) don't know, playing games

Interview 10 March: 27 - 40

Gary was left guessing what was in my mind and did not venture a suggestion, which was in contrast to the other children. Because I recognised Gary's reluctance to engage in conversations, I felt impelled to fill the gaps, and in so doing continue the cycle of Gary having to guess what is in my mind. His silence in evading direct questioning defined his participation. My intuitive intervention effectively restricted his learning.

One response to procrastinating behaviours was to differentiate the tasks. Gary's behaviours were frequently met by my intervention which invaded his planned action. Gary had not chosen anyone to work with, nor had he

been chosen. In a mathematics task (19) I intended to support him through one-to-one conversation, moving his intuitive sense to an educated sense. Joe called across to him 'It's all right Gary. You can do it by yourself once you get the hang of it!' How did Gary feel about this singular attention, and how did peers construe the fact that I remained with him? Seated at a table with him, I had the option of leaving, which by implication was not available to him. My progressively confining questions were peculiar to my interactions with him. In return his responses were increasingly context bound, unelaborated and supported by gesture. My questioning ultimately narrowed the curriculum for him, which confirms Bennett e al.'s (1984) findings. Gary sorted butterflies in a data handling task (19),

Teacher: .....it's going to be plain you say, plain and.....?

Gary: big

Teacher: Okay. Can you find a plain and big one first of all?

Gary: Yes, that's big, that's spotty (pointing to two separate butterflies)

Teacher: All on one

Gary: (points to the correct one)

Teacher: That's right, big..

Gary: and plain. Cut it out?

Gary (19) : 1 - 10

It has been suggested by Chaiklin and Lave (1993) and Minick (1996) that teachers redefine their utterances as representational directives, focusing upon the meaning of words, not the situation as a whole. I am aware of this in my practice. It is a strategy I use in differentiating tasks, which in the above task reduced Gary's control of learning and devalued the assessment. On another occasion I differentiated Andrew's task to target what I believed to be his potential learning, (21) which he subsequently rejected. I had cognitively matched the task to Andrew, but had not captured his interests.

Andrew's control of learning was less subtle. His understanding was assessed through diagnostic conversations, as discussed previously (Torrance and Pryor, 1998). Often these were informal and opportunistic.

He had shown difficulty in recording number bonds to six (21). I sat at the group where he was working with a worksheet and multilinks for counting. I asked him to read the 'problems' to me which he did with help, supplying the first missing number. The problems were  $6 = 3 + ?$ ,  $6 = ? + ?$ ,  $6 = 8 - ?$ ,  $6 = ? - ?$ . (? denotes a gap) I then asked him to complete the recording begun for him, whilst I remained nearby. Andrew sat with both elbows on the table, but said nothing. Again I talked through the first problem, waiting for him to write. He told me the correct answer but remained motionless, staring expressionless until I prompted him to action, putting my finger where he should write. In this manner he achieved the intended outcome.

Andrew's efforts were overseen by peers. The following day a child who had been successful offered to help him with a similar task. I observed Andrew's rejection of help, sliding his chair back and throwing paper on the floor. I asked if he needed help and he mouthed, 'No, I can do it' but did not give eye contact. When I attempted to scaffold, picking up from his existing knowledge as I had with Luke (1), he retorted, 'I know what to do. I've done it'. He had engaged with the task verbally, but the purpose was to use the symbols correctly. Either he did not understand the task requirements, chose to reject them, or he did not see the need. In interview, I asked, 'What happened when Jeremy was going to give you help?'. His response was, 'I didn't ask for it.' The differential treatment was not successful, for he did not share my purpose of assessing the symbolic representation. In a culture which perhaps valued correct answers above process, supplying the answer sufficed from his perspective. My subsequent attempts to construct learning conversations were met with powerful silence.

The interplay of power and control to serve the coping strategies of multiple individuals within a community of learners is complex and in a continual state of flux. If power to regulate learning is handed back and forth between teacher and learner, then the learner not only takes responsibility, but learns how self-regulation operates. This does not happen intuitively, but has a place as part of the classroom culture. Power

structures and maintains classroom organisation through discourse. What emerges and is taken as important depends upon the actors within that organisation, their interpretations and understandings of the settings in which they learn.

In response to my fourth research question

- In the recursive sequence of teaching, learning and assessment, what role does the distribution of power play in the incidence of procrastinating behaviours?

I discern the following patterns in the data,

- Assessment which is informal, and emphasises situational sense, lends opportunities for pupils to share control
- Differentiation which stems from a broad approach, effectively narrows the opportunities for learners to assume control.
- The teacher's use of language can effectively confine power and restrict possible responses which could be empowering
- Reward systems as differential treatments define failures, where the intention is to encourage.
- Children who *manage* their procrastinating behaviours to serve their own agendas, exercise control which may be used positively in relationship with others, not in avoidance or against them.
- Learners disrupt teachers' agendas where there is ambiguity or coercion, and where they do not share common understanding of the purpose of the task
- Children who procrastinate are operating outside the working consensus, and as such exert personal control.

### **Educational implications of the use of power.**

The opportunity to observe and listen to these children in diagnostic conversations has been most valuable and a useful strategy in the identification and reduction of procrastinating behaviours. From their relatively weak structural position, their procrastinating behaviours allow them to pursue their own agendas, when the teacher agenda is not understood, not within their interests or beyond what they perceive are their

capabilities. The political strategies they employ symbolise their coping strategies. I see that my assessments of them as underachieving, are in part due to the confining situations I create in which they are assessed. In addition, this study has alerted me to the values I communicate to learners, which are interpreted to become part of the classroom culture. These perceptions of teacher values run counter to my personal theory of learning and my belief system. They need to be regularly monitored for they are sited in the practice of teaching, learning and assessment and impinge upon adaptive behaviours which include procrastination.

#### **vii. The implications of my findings for primary practice.**

First I considered the theoretical interpretations of procrastinating behaviours in the social constructivist paradigm. In the context of this study, whilst scaffolding proved an effective intervention in reducing these behaviours, the difficulties and dilemmas of achieving this in practice have been highlighted by the data. The constraints on teacher time when working with multiple perspectives prohibit the attention needed, so I believe it is worthwhile to consider how behaviours may be reduced by strategies which encourage children to value discourse as a means of learning from each other guided by the teacher.

In terms of task organisation and management, the data suggest that in tasks which are perceived to demand individual writing, these children procrastinate for longer periods and intermittently for the duration of the task. The time allocations and pace of these tasks tend to be overgenerous. As a result motivation is low and the quality of written work does not meet expectation. Acceptance of these outcomes from children indicates implicit approval and perpetuates the procrastinating behaviours in the guise of 'needing help'. Where writing is an integral part of a collaborative task, the quality of the outcome is dependent upon the collaborative and discursive skills within the group.

Tasks which were individually scaffolded in this study tended to be those which demanded hierarchical knowledge, and as such were dominated by

procedural concerns. The procrastinating behaviours in these hierarchical tasks, were awaiting the attention the learners expected. In tasks intended to assess process, procrastinating behaviours appeared to be related to children's lack of understanding of what was expected of them, guessing what was in the teacher's mind. Where children positively managed their procrastinating behaviours to achieve the expected outcome, they were sufficiently confident at the outset of the task and 'filled the time'. All children adapted their procrastinating behaviours in response to the variety of tasks, although Gary was most consistent in his **conforming** behaviours. The children's existing knowledge in relation to the task and their interests, their understanding of what was communicated as the purpose and demands of the task, and the socio-historical features of the task settings seemed to determine the behaviours.

The group composition itself impacts upon the behaviours and the outcome of the tasks. As the children who procrastinate do so within a community, there is mutual shared responsibility for those behaviours. As such any strategies are suggested in relation to that community of learners, with a special focus on the children who repeatedly procrastinate.

### **Suggested teaching strategies.**

The teacher strategies concern three main areas which are inter-related in the communicative process.

#### *a. Task organisation and management.*

- Make explicit the ground rules for participation including valued talk.
- In discourse with the learner, locate the purpose of tasks in previous and potential learning, sharing where it fits overall in the curriculum.
- In diagnostic conversation confirm the common understanding of task demands and ways to proceed.
- Involve the learner in establishing the criteria by which learning will be judged, ensuring those criteria reflect the sequence of learning.
- Balance the social and cognitive demands of the task, matching purpose to organisation.



- Seize opportunities to scaffold, allow time for reflection and joint monitoring of progress.
- Use informal formative assessments of situational learning where children can use interpretative skills.
- Differentiate teaching style to individual differences, agreeing with the learner what will be accepted as an outcome
- Encourage enquiry through shared questioning which does not foreclose on the learners' interpretations

*b. Socio-cultural*

- In conversations as teacher and listener hear the perceptions of what constitutes the cultural knowledge of the classroom
- Give responsibility for self-regulation through choices in the use of human and physical resources
- Encourage a culture of shared effort through discourse whilst maintaining the prerogative to ask for individual work

*c. Emotional.*

- Devise and share with the learners consistent strategies for dealing with error
- Respect working relationships of peers which promote collaborative work
- Motivate through group participation, helping learners to differentiate between difficulty, ability and effort.
- Observe, listen to and respect alternative interpretations of tasks, fostering a sharing of power and control of learning.

The practical implications of adopting these strategies concern planning, building relationships over time and fostering a community culture of mutual support. Central to all these is the valued role of discourse for learning. In planning to include these strategies, there is a marked shift in perspective from the individual to the community. Present practice focuses upon individual needs and differentiation which progressively narrows the curriculum and pupils' control of learning (Code of Practice, 1994). Tasks are differentiated to produce outcomes tailored to the perceived abilities of the child. In the strategies suggested, the individual is in focus with a share

in the control of learning. Teaching, learning and assessment are tailored to meet preferred learning styles, rather than a broad approach which results in differential consequences. The planned goal is mature participation *in* community activity, not at the edge of it.

**The significance of this research.**

The findings of this study may be applied to other infant classrooms because of similarities in the social contexts and in the interests of participants. The value of observation and listening to learners has been particularly salient for me. My assumptions about what goes on in the periods of procrastination have been challenged, and I have built relationships on understanding. In the course of the study I have discovered the learners' interests, their perceptions of school and expectations of me as teacher. Their richness in imagination, creativity and sense of self within the class community have been ever present. Above all their co-operation and will to be discovered tells a story of its own.

I have reflected on the validity of scaffolding in the Vygotskian sense, and confirmed the constraints of doing so in the classroom setting. In simultaneously scaffolding for multiple perspectives, the gaps that yawn wide open for some and smile invitingly for others are papered over. The learning conversations which take place in the course of Vygotskian scaffolding provide the foundations for future learning. In simultaneous scaffolding, words have multiple interpretations and the learning conversation between co-participants becomes the site of future learning. In practice it is the social structure of the classroom which allows such conversations, yet the discourse is expected to be task-related and knowledge or skills based. As one cannot exist without the other, the importance of the socio-cultural structure should be considered alongside 'coming to know'. Social discourse acts as a test bed for provisional knowledge which can be brought to the intellectual arena. This study has pointed to the significance of matching social and cognitive demands of tasks, and to the dilemmas of individuals simultaneously sustaining social and intellectual status. It has shown how learners construct classroom

cultural knowledge in interpreting the words and actions, values and beliefs of community members.

The significance of this research lies in

- Its relevance to other classrooms and teacher practitioners
- The identification of procrastinating behaviours in assigned tasks
- The shift in focus from the individual, to the individual within a community of learners
- The emphasis it places on understanding the child's perspective of the learning situation
- The value it places on the communicative process to reduce procrastinating behaviours through collaboration and discourse
- The attention it affords to the dilemmas of pursuing theoretically informed interventions
- The importance of observation, enquiry and listening in diagnostic conversations which inform assessment as an integral part of teaching and learning
- The strategies suggested to replace the procrastinating behaviours

### **Summary of the data.**

The data supports my theory that procrastinating behaviours impede full participation in assigned tasks. They are part of the communicative process in that they signal when the child and teacher agendas are not in harmony. In Vygotskian scaffolding in dyadic settings there is potential to reduce the incidence of procrastination, holding features of the task in mind for the child. In the process, the analytical tools necessary to approach tasks are modelled. However, scaffolding is constrained by time and the numbers of children for which scaffolding may be appropriate at any one time. Hence, in my view the responsibility for reducing procrastinating behaviours must be shared by teacher and learners in the community.

In planning, organising and managing tasks, whilst due regard is generally paid to matching tasks to cognitive ability, social and discorsal skills tend to be marginalised. The value status of task-related discourse remains

implicit. Opportunities to scaffold may be missed because of the need to organise and manage the whole class, reducing scaffolding to a reactive intervention. Children's roles and control of the tasks may be restricted by the planned introduction of particular resources, and the directives that teachers use in setting tasks. Also the co-participants in a task influence what is publicly exposed as existing thinking and may challenge the perceived status of other participants. Finally, procrastinating behaviours themselves might be viewed as the learners' management of engagement in a task. As such the learner is exerting control over their participation which may or may not have mature participation as its ultimate goal.

When the communicative process is insufficiently supportive and learners cannot or are not motivated to make the same sense of the task as the teacher and task setter, then they may interpret tasks in ways which confirm their existing learning, making their own sense. In this their learning identities play an important role and at the same time are constructed. Within the classroom culture, their perceived status as learners in the eyes of their peers and teacher appears to impinge upon their commitment to assigned tasks. Learning identities, power and control seem inextricably linked to the incidence of procrastinating behaviours. Discourse that is valued as a medium for learning from each other offers the opportunity for coming to understand procrastinating behaviours. Assessment through learning conversations, which has been implicit in my observations and interviews, has lent insights which would not otherwise have been available to me.

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION.**

I have addressed my research questions through an analysis structured upon the theoretical perspectives on procrastinating behaviours, the organisation and management of tasks, creating common understanding, the learning identities of children who procrastinate and the distribution of power in teaching, learning and assessment. I began by looking at what may have been sited in the tasks that gave rise to the behaviours, then asked what teachers and learners may do to reduce those behaviours, bridging from peripheral to full participation. Finally I suggested strategies which may replace the incidence of those behaviours. These teaching strategies and insights into alternative behaviours, designed to foster the value of collaborative and discursive skills, were taken from my discussion of the data.

### **My findings.**

First I consider my findings in relation to my first research question:

- What possible interpretations of procrastinating behaviours are offered by social constructivist theories of learning?

This question is discussed in detail in my review of the literature Chapter 2, and first section of Chapter 4, the data analysis, yet permeates the subsequent research questions. The data in relation to my classroom practice indicate that underlying my professed social constructivist view of learning is a practice of individualist and behaviourist teaching, which is communicated to the learners. This pluralist approach reflects the dilemmas I described in the review of the literature, between the curriculum that is to be taught, and my personal theory of the way children learn. As an outcome of this pluralist approach, I have found an emphasis on product oriented tasks and tasks which preclude interpretation. How children interpret and approach assigned tasks appears to be related to the construed purpose and meaning of that task and the way they relate their experience in one task to another. If relations between tasks are obscure or hold little interest for the learner, then procrastinating behaviours seem likely to arise. When the ultimate goal of these behaviours is mature or full participation, then arguably these behaviours are considered politic or legitimate. In the

assigned tasks which concerned me, the children appeared not to have the analytical tools to approach the task, therefore I could not believe that their goal was full participation. Further discourse in learning conversations might be needed to clarify this.

The second research question was:

- In individual and group assigned tasks, what are the possible links between communication and procrastinating behaviours?

In order to answer this it was necessary to examine task organisation and management and its role in maintaining the communicative process. This helped learners to come to the same shared understanding of assigned tasks, as the teacher. For these particular learners, the nature and management of these assigned tasks fosters a dependency, which is demanding of teacher time and at the same time may also be perpetuated by individual scaffolding. Herein lies a further dilemma, for simultaneously scaffolding tasks to take into account multiple perspectives leaves some learners on the periphery of mature participation. These perspectives may be understood through assessment in learning conversations which, as an integral part of teaching and learning, have the potential to inform practice, and lend insights into procrastinating behaviours.

Thirdly I asked:

- What influence do learning identities of individuals have in determining co-participation towards a shared purpose?

The data point to the mutual constitution of learning identities in task related activity. Learners appeared to avoid challenge in tasks where there might have been a risk to their personal status within the group, or their cognitive status. Their performance in assigned tasks appeared to be influenced by the teacher's use of praise and feedback. and by the audience for such reflective comments. Where children were uncertain of their status in relation to the tasks, their strategies which preserved their self image appeared to include, interpreting the tasks to confirm existing learning, outright rejection of the tasks or conforming thus avoiding challenge.

Finally, the fourth question asks:

- In the recursive sequence of teaching, learning and assessment, what role does the distribution of power play in the incidence of procrastinating behaviours?

The data suggest that power is implicit in the classroom culture where it is resistant to challenge and becomes part of the ground rules for participation. The interpretations children place on assigned task demands, may have much to do with their enculturalisation in the classroom community. Looking at the teacher's role in the maintenance of power, use of directives, praise and feedback in assigned tasks, may constrain participation and maintain the teacher's control of learning. Power is sustained through questioning for cognitive, managerial and status preserving purposes.

In the context of this study, my interpretation of the data lead me to believe,

- a. Whilst for the majority of pupils enculturalisation in classroom knowledge leads them to participate in assigned tasks, for others this is not so.
- b. For those learners who procrastinate, the communicative process fails to offer a cohesive structure through which assigned tasks may be interpreted, and the learners' existing experiences do not support their efforts to make the same situational sense as that of the task setter. Where the communicative process leaves gaps, the motivation to fill those gaps competes with more vital 'interests-at-hand'.
- c. Learners' procrastinating behaviours are adaptive strategies which do not follow a predictable pattern. Tasks which share similar demands do not consistently evoke similar procrastinating behaviours from the same individual. Equally within a single task, individuals respond differently in their procrastinating behaviours. This reflects the dynamic and mutually constituting nature of learning, which has much to do with what is to be learnt and what is worthwhile in the estimation of the co-participants.
- d. Differentiation of assigned tasks to reduce the incidence of procrastinating behaviours may serve to maintain those behaviours.

### **My findings in relation to the conceptual background.**

The conceptual background to understanding procrastinating behaviours informs the shift of this study from the focus upon *individual* responses to tasks, to *community* responsibility for replacing those behaviours. Theoretically, the democratic views of learning expressed by situated cognitivists offer scope for this (Rogoff (1993), Lave (1988), Lave and Wenger (1991)). In practice, the learning contexts in terms of actors participating in tasks are unceasingly changing. Those changes may be brought about in the act of learning, and in the organisation and management of tasks. I have found that translation of this theoretical perspective into practice, where changes and choice are pivotal factors, tends to exacerbate the procrastinating behaviours. Participation by all in this mutually constituting activity is dependent upon the actions of one or more experienced members. Rogoff's (1993) socio-cultural planes of analysis for participation offer a perspective for understanding the behaviours. However, I believe that the procrastinating behaviours I observed were, on occasions, insufficiently focused upon the assigned tasks to be considered legitimate peripheral participation en route to mature participation. In my view, for these learners the process of participation itself should be an explicit focus, in order that they come to appreciate their role in the learning process. In practical terms, this has implications for time and planning but is a responsibility shared by teacher and learner.

With reference to the school effectiveness studies [Galton et al. (1980), Bennet et al. (1984), Mortimore et al. (1988), Tizard et al. (1988), Alexander et al. (1995), Alexander (1997), Galton et al. (1999)], I have shown in my data the shortcoming of judging behaviours in relation to tasks which are categorised according to teacher-intended learning. This is because learners actively interpret those tasks and bring an array of experience to the learning situation. If taken alone, my observations might have been interpreted to support the findings of Alexander et al. (1995) who quantified time 'off task'. A non-participant observer might have assigned the observed behaviours to categories used in that study. However, with the added dimension of the child's perspective on the task, and



participant observation, the categorisation does not adequately describe what concerns me in procrastinating behaviours.

I propose that procrastinating behaviours occur when the communicative process is insufficiently supportive for learners to share common understanding. I have found in my data many instances when procrastinating behaviours have arisen through difficulties in making situational sense, as described by Bruner (1996), Bruner and Haste (1987), Chaiklin and Lave (1993). Instances where differentiated instruction and differentiated expectation have led to procrastinating behaviours are also evident, which is in keeping with Minick's (1996) work on teacher's use of instructional directives. These writers have addressed learning but not procrastinating behaviours in particular. I propose it is the cognitive demands, in conjunction with the particular socio-historical backgrounds and learning identities, which contribute to the incidence of procrastinating behaviours. My data concerning the coping strategies of children - and teachers - in this study has much in common with Pollard (1982, 1994). Enculturation in classroom knowledge has formed a vital part of my data collection. This reflects the case studies described in Pollard (1985), Pollard and Bourne (1994) and Pollard and Filer (1996). Finally, the theoretical significance of learning identities maintained by Lave and Wenger (1991) and demonstrated through case study by Pollard and Filer (1999) is also evident in the data I present here.

### **The practical and theoretical significance of this research.**

Whilst my data adds incrementally to the findings of the writers referred to in this study, there is little explanatory knowledge on the topic of procrastinating behaviours, and none known to me from the perspective of a teacher-researcher. Understanding of these behaviours is accessible through children's perspectives, given in discourse with an interested listener. This study goes beyond description, contributing to understanding the issue, and offering strategies which seek to replace the procrastinating behaviours. In addition, the strategies suggested in Chapter 4 arise from a

practitioner perspective derived from the data, and as such may be applicable to other classrooms which share a similar institutional setting.

Theoretically, the study is significant for the emphasis it places upon discourse between children, as well as adults, as a valued medium for understanding children's perspectives, learning and encouraging participation. Social and intellectual discourse are mutually supporting. A social constructivist theory of learning underpins this view, yet curriculum learning in assigned tasks demands a pluralist approach. In practice, neither a theory of individual learning nor a single theory of learning is helpful. A pluralist approach is needed to manage the contradictions between the curriculum to be taught and the way children learn. This approach is shared by teacher and learner, with the teacher as expert, guiding the novice learner into the intended learning. In the translation of this approach, without the support of constructive dialogue the children I study procrastinate. I see procrastinating behaviours as individuals' challenges, conscious or unconscious, which assert their right to make choices. The very act of questioning or challenging the right to make choices is fostered in some situations and curtailed in others.

The significance of the research for practice in methodological terms, is that the teacher gains insights through focused observation and interview which would otherwise not be apparent. In including observation and interview in my planning, I have valued the children's perspectives which have fed recursively into future planning. However, observation and interview have not been easily achieved within the demands of class teaching. The gains in relationships and effecting change through growing understanding are weighed against the disadvantages. In focusing attention on particular learners it affords a significance to those learners, or behaviours, which is not necessarily understood by peers. Those learners who are in focus, may not themselves understand the attention received, or might feel it oppressive. Their behaviour and responses may be sustained by the very attention they receive. Significantly, observations in tasks which demanded an intensive teaching or assessment role were most difficult to record and the data remained incomplete. Immersion in teaching detracted

from the recording. However, this is again weighed against the advantages. As teacher-researcher, I have become aware of my own values, preconceptions and tacit pedagogical theories. My intuitive explanations for behaviours have been challenged through the process of interview and participant observation. The power of the study is in the evidence base I now have to replace those intuitions. I made frequent reference to the behaviours in discussion with those children's parents, and illustratively with colleagues. Through the interviews I have built an intensity of relationships which time and numbers do not usually allow. This has supported my view of these children in relationship to learning and as a learner in the community of learners.

Fellow professionals should find this study relevant to their practice for it

- identifies procrastinating behaviours which are problematical to full participation in learning.
- emphasises the potential for replacing procrastinating behaviours by differentiating teaching style.
- values the promotion of discourse and discursive skills for mutual learning between peers, thereby reducing dependency upon the teacher and drawing the procrastinating learner into full participation.
- draws attention to the power of observation and interview in discovering discrepancies between intended, taught and received curricula. The interpretations placed upon assigned tasks are then opened to teacher and procrastinating learner.
- suggests that what is interpreted by the children as the curriculum, should be acknowledged by the teacher as part of the knowledge base for future learning.
- proposes a dialectic approach in both formal and informal situations through which assessments are made as an integral part of teaching and learning. Process becomes the focus of tasks, as well as products.

For policy makers the findings of this study are significant for they show first, the value of formative assessment and secondly the narrowing effect of differentiation in assigned tasks. Performance measurements and the demand for standardisation lead to a practice based upon summative

assessments which become public, whilst formative assessments regularly inform planning and empower the learner yet are not valued in the same way. For the children who procrastinate, formative assessment is most likely to reflect their role as learners, offering *them* the chance to take some control of learning and the teacher genuine insights into the processes of learning.

In differentiating tasks in order to include learners who procrastinate, the data has shown that the intended learning is narrowed, or the responsibility for it passed to another. Increasingly expectation of learners is diminished, as tasks expand to the time available or assumptions are made concerning what can be achieved without additional support. The needs of children are defined by the situations they find themselves in, and as such policy makers should refocus from individual needs to the individual in the community.

### **Dissemination and further questions.**

Aimed at promoting professional discourse, I propose to disseminate the findings of this research study with due regard to ethical issues, by making it accessible to an audience of teacher practitioners. I would be interested in exploring the possibility of sharing my findings 'on-line', in educational newspapers or journals and at an appropriate conference. At a more local level the findings may be shared with practitioners in Local Authority Staff Training courses, and cluster meetings of neighbourhood schools. In publicising the findings of this study I identify the following questions as worthy of further research,

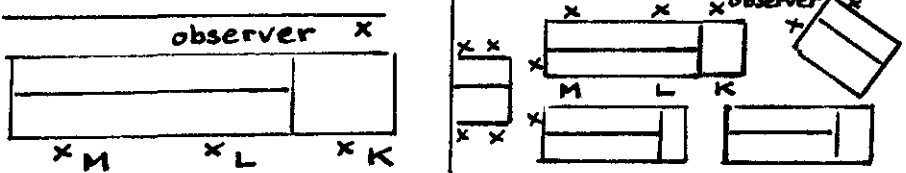
- How are children who repeatedly procrastinate equipped to analyse assigned tasks?
- Which organisational strategies promote discursive skills which engage the child who procrastinates?
- What do children who procrastinate recall of assigned tasks in periods of reflection?
- To procrastinate is to exercise control. How may this control be harnessed to work in harmony *with* the working consensus?

Further exploration would contribute explanatory and strategic knowledge to the existing discussion, looking at ways teachers and learners may work collaboratively towards the goal of *full participation*. Both teacher and learner would have a role to play in replacing the behaviours and sharing power and control. In the action of seeking to understand the child's perspective, discourse would have an enhanced role and become valued as a means of mutual learning.

Earlier in this study I cited Lave (1991) who wrote that the concept of legitimate peripheral participation 'derives from the richness of its interconnections' (1991:39). In order to understand the incidence of procrastinating behaviours, this study is also concerned with 'a richness of interconnections'. No single feature of a task, its setting or the participants may prompt procrastinating behaviours, but all have a history which is continually in the making. It is that history which prepares the learner for future participation, and which we, together with the learner, write.

The findings of this study are that: procrastinating behaviours have much to do with what is available to be learnt and its perceived relevance to the learners. The incidence of procrastinating behaviours is influenced by teaching style, task organisation and management and the learning context which includes the co-participants and physical resources. The value status of the role of discourse as a medium through which we learn from one another is undermined by a pre-occupation with product oriented tasks, which may dispose a learner to procrastinate in the absence of analytical tools to proceed. These findings are relevant to other practitioners, for the primary classroom setting has common demands imposed upon it and similarities in terms of actors engaged in activity constructing meaning from curriculum learning. The incidence of those behaviours may be different to those described here, but nevertheless once identified and understood, they may be utilised to empower the learner to participate beyond the periphery. If strategies to bridge from procrastinating behaviours to full participation are not in place then these children, like Luke, may pass their time in assigned tasks 'waiting for it to be over'.

**An example of an observation schedule using three minute sweeps.**

PLANNING	
<b>Date:</b>	25 September
<b>Time:</b>	09.20
<b>Planned duration:</b>	40 minutes
<b>Grouping:</b>	Established writing groups of four from which pairs are to work together.
<b>Shared objective:</b>	Given in the introduction and written on the board for reference. <i>To use adjectives, adverbs and similes to describe Aunt Sponge and Aunt Spiker, from 'James and the Giant Peach' by Roald Dahl.</i>
SKETCH OF SEATING ARRANGEMENT.	
	
INTRODUCTION OF TASK.	
<p>(In practice completed post-observation at the end of the session)</p> <p>On the carpet with the whole group. In questioning I led the children to consider the characters, their role and what had happened to them as the Peach left the garden. The text gave little information about them. What sort of characters did the children think they were? How did they look?</p> <p>Children made suggestions some of which were presented as similes. I related their ideas to the objective using the words <i>similes</i>, <i>adjectives</i> and <i>adverbs</i>, which had been introduced in the literacy hour. I intended that after thirty minutes the writing would be shared with another person who had not helped them to write. After reading or listening to the description, this person would try to draw a picture of Aunt Sponge and Aunt Spiker based on the writing.</p> <p>Children collected their exercise books, pencils and dictionaries then sat at tables in groupings selected by me. At each table were two groups of four. (There were space restrictions and I wanted to preserve the carpet area as a whole group gathering area.) Once the children were seated, I wrote two headings on the board, <i>Aunt Sponge</i> and <i>Aunt Spiker</i>. Under each I wrote 'is as .....as...' 'is like a .....', adding the spellings of some of their contributions.</p>	
OBSERVATIONS	
9.35	M. looking in dictionary. L. overlooks, talks about the letter sequence. Ruler on table for underlining. L. begins to measure the pictures in the dictionary.
9.38	hiding and finding pencils under the table. Both join in
9.41	L. suddenly looks up at the board, begins to copy the titles
9.44	L. asks K. next to him, 'Do you think she's fat?'
9.47	All class seated. L. chin on writing book, turning pages of dictionary
.....	
10.11	Stop to exchange writing. L. and M decide who will go first and begin straight away

**The method of transcription used in a semi-structured interview.**

- i. The text is transcribed sequentially, so that the first complete utterance is numbered 1. and subsequent utterances follow this, hence if the teacher opens the interview, this is line 1 and the response 2. The interviews are dated and referred to in the text of this study first by date, then lines as for example, Interview March 3 : 12 - 14.
- ii. Non-verbal language is added after the utterance which it accompanied. Emphasis and intonation is added in italics, with additional notes to support when typographical devices seem inadequate.
- iii. Pauses within utterances are marked so ..... with pauses of more than 5 seconds noted.
- iv. Sections of the transcription which have been omitted in the text are indicated by ..... between the lines which demarcate the speakers.
- v. Questions in italics indicate the agenda I consciously brought to the semi-structured interview.

Interview March 10 : 1 - 8

*Teacher: Can you tell me what you think about school?*

Andrew: I like it (fixing eye contact)

*Teacher: Why do we come to school?*

Andrew: To work

*Teacher: What do you look forward to when you come to school?*

Andrew: playing

Teacher: You said you come to school to work and to play...is there a difference?

Andrew: (hands ranging over the table to indicate cars moving) Yes....work is when you go off and play stuff.. Play is with cars and that.

The interview continued to include these questions

*Teacher: So when you're writing things down in the book are you doing that by yourself or with other people?*

*Teacher: And what do you like doing best?*

*Teacher: What do you know you are good at in school?*

*Teacher: When you need help, where do you get that help?*

**An excerpt from an unstructured interview: Luke, March 10: 1 - 23.**

Luke was shown a selection of photographs of children in the classroom and hall. He appeared in some of the photographs which had been taken over a period since September. Before the interview I had made a random selection and planned an unstructured interview.

Luke: They're from the Early Years Unit.

Me: They're from the Early Years Unit you think?

Luke: Yes There's me looking for my sock.

Me: And which one are you going to tell me about...

Luke: That one

Me: And what's happening there?

Luke: I ..er... have a new..... a ..another teacher

*(He is actually mistaken, for the picture showed his first morning in Year 1 as he arrived. The teacher he referred to was a parent settling a child.)*

Me: It is actually this classroom. It was right at the beginning of term when you first came into this classroom. How do you think you were feeling?

Luke: I don't know what I was feeling (says laughing)

Me: Is there another one of you?

Luke: I'm there, I'm going home

Me: Do you think you were pleased to be going home?

Luke: (laughs) No

Me: Why not?

Luke: I wanted to stay at school because I like school.

.....we've talked about that one (moving on to another photograph)

Me: Have we?

Luke: It's when I was looking for my sock

Me: What in the computer!?! (laughs)

Luke: No it was when someone threw it over there. D does that a lot.

Me: And what do you think about that?

Luke: I don't like it. I don't feel happy when D takes my clothes...when D hits me with a bag, a PE bag

Me: D comes up a lot. Do you have lots of arguments with him?

Luke: He won't leave me alone.



**An overview of the assigned tasks observed.**

FOCUS CHILD	TASK	CLASSROOM ORGANISATION	TEACHER'S ROLE	OUTCOME.
Luke (1)	Mathematics: Coins to make ten pence	Small groups working as individuals on a variety of mathematics topics	Itinerant monitoring. Move from non-participant to participant observer	Individual outcome in commercial scheme workbook
Luke (2) Daniel	Science/mathematics: To explore the properties of regular and irregular shapes reflected in a mirror	Whole group introduction, followed by a choice of working individually or with a partner	To link experience and knowledge of the properties of light. To demonstrate resources and act as participant observer, monitoring all	The activity itself, supported by verbal report and reasoning. Drawings were to support the activity, not act as a record
Luke (3)	Mathematics: Introduction to and use of place value resources -partitioning	Small group (4) within a grouped class of 26. Individual or small group collaboration	Verbally present the problem, monitor, scaffold support and act as participant observer	Individual or joint outcome. Practical and written record.
Andrew (4)	English: Imaginative writing on the theme of ' <i>Journeys</i> '. Linked with Design Technology, bookmaking, for a display at a presentation to parents	Introduced as a whole class task with differentiated support before moving to work in small groups	Itinerant, extending ideas, offering vocabulary, monitoring progress. Participant observer	Individual. (Where peer support lead to similar outcomes this was used to highlight different possible interpretations)
Joe (5)	English: diary writing	5 Groups of 6 writing simultaneously	Itinerant, supplying vocabulary and spellings upon request.	Individual writing in exercise books with additions to personal dictionaries.

**An overview of the assigned tasks observed.**

FOCUS CHILD	TASK	CLASSROOM ORGANISATION	TEACHER'S ROLE	OUTCOME
Luke (6)	English: Write a new verse for the song ' <i>London Bridge is falling down.</i> ' for presentation to the school in a class assembly on the science topic 'Materials'	Introduced as a whole group participating in the actions to the rhyme. Alternative ideas to those sung were received in the whole group and written individually	To maintain the link from the hall setting to the classroom, and over the lunch time break. To revise the rhyme activity, prompt use of word books and peer support. Participant observer.	Individual outcome in exercise books shared with the class for evaluation. Which would be appropriate for inclusion in the assembly?
Joe (7) Gary Luke	English: Class project to write a guide to the Childrens' Gallery in Big Book format for Key Stage 1 readers.	Whole group discussion of the contents. 'Democratic' assignment of areas to be covered by small groups of 5 - 7.	To lead discussion, adjudicate, partition areas of interest into content areas. Itinerant role, time marker, participant observer. Collate outcomes.	Individual or collaborative writing plus illustrations. Small groups to proof read. Teacher lead whole group review of the Big Book.
Gary (8)  Daniel  Luke	English: Description of the characters Aunt Sponge and Aunt Spiker from ' <i>James and the Giant Peach</i> ' by Roald Dahl. Present description for a child to draw an illustration based on the information given.	Choice of working individually or with one or two other children	Introduced the task to the whole group, recording on the blackboard examples of simile the children suggested together with vocabulary. Teacher available for additional spellings.	A written cameo of Aunt Sponge and Aunt Spiker.  A drawing from the description offered.  Individual or small group outcome.

**An overview of the assigned tasks observed.**

FOCUS CHILD	TASK	CLASSROOM ORGANISATION	TEACHER'S ROLE	OUTCOME
Joe (9) Gary	English: Drama (stimulus 'A Quiet Night In!' by Jill Murphy	Small group of 7, independent activity in the literacy hour	Non-interventionist. Acting as observer and conducting guided reading with small group of 7	Plenary performance for class audience evaluation
Daniel (10)	Mathematics problem solving task involving manipulating numbers within twenty in narrative form	Individual working one to one. Class in assembly	Reader as necessary. Participant observer	Verbally presented solution, supported by idiosyncratic (transient) representations of numerical working
Daniel (11)	English: Structure a story with a beginning, middle and end, titled 'The magical chair'	Whole group introduction, then individual work in small groups of 6	To listen as the children offer their experience of stories at home. Lead discussion to arrive at a consensus for the class task title. Support with vocabulary and spellings	Individual outcomes in exercise books for teacher assessment. Known support coded as such.
Joe (12) Andrew Daniel	History, problem solving: How to put out a fire in the baron's hall of Norman Mountfitchet castle (the river is at the foot of the hill on which it is built)	Children were free to chose their working groups, appointing a spokesperson at the outset, who would speak for the group in evaluation time.	To monitor the selection of group members and their involvement in the task. To move thinking forward. To act as participant observer.	Presentation of logistic ideas through the spokesperson with equal opportunity to appraise other's ideas.

**An overview of the assigned tasks observed.**

FOCUS CHILD	TASK	CLASSROOM ORGANISATION	TEACHER'S ROLE	OUTCOME
Joe (13)	Science: Why does a candle extinguish when a jam jar is placed over the flame?	Introduced to the whole group, then children move to small groups of 5 or 6	To collect individual hypotheses, demonstrate, give instructions and monitor individual understanding orally.	Individual diagrammatic drawing supported by a caption, or orally explained to be scribed by the teacher
Andrew (14)	Art/science: Observational drawing using light and shade	Small groups of 4 within the whole class group	Whole group exposition and revision of light and shadow. Discussion of media and techniques. Monitor whole group. Participant observer	Drawing with verbal evaluation to include perspectives of others within the same group
Luke (15)	The Literacy Hour: <i>The Rainbow Fish</i> .	Thirty minutes whole class, followed by twenty minutes small group (6) work	(Student teacher) lead the whole group text reading. Engaged with one small group in guided reading. Independent work for other groups	Whole group read in unison, respond to teacher questioning. This small group drawing things beginning with 's' found in the sea. Individual outcome
Joe (16)	P.E. Animal movements	(student teacher) Introduced to whole group sharing one task, developed to small groups working on different tasks.	(student teacher) The task was introduced to the whole group, progressively differentiating instructions.	Planned activity practised to be shared with the class audience.

**An overview of the assigned tasks observed.**

FOCUS CHILD	TASK	CLASSROOM ORGANISATION	TEACHER'S ROLE	OUTCOME
Joe (17)	'Free choice' construction toys	Individuals selecting their working groups.	(Student teacher) Monitor and evaluate the activity jointly with the child before the child changes task.	Verbal evaluation with the teacher and peers
Joe (18)	English: Poetry writing	Collaborative pairs and trios	Introduce the task following the television programme, <i>Writing and Pictures</i> , then itinerant support to oral discussion in groups.	Draft or verbal presentation of the poem's progress in whole group evaluation time.
Gary (19)	Mathematics: Using a Carroll diagram	Whole group working individually using two worksheets from the mathematics scheme	Whole class demonstration by analogy. Seated with a parent helper and one small group. Visual sweep monitoring of the class. Participant observer	Individual worksheets supported by verbal explanation and reasoning
Daniel (20)	Computer software: ' <i>Daryl the Dragon</i> ' problem solving	Program introduced to whole group with instructions. 3 groups of 2 at 3 computers. Others at writing activity	To select children to use the program and revise instructions given the previous day. Participant observer.	Dialogue between two children, tape recorded. Success or otherwise in reaching the solution

**An overview of the assigned tasks observed.**

FOCUS CHILD	TASK	CLASSROOM ORGANISATION	TEACHER'S ROLE	OUTCOME
Andrew (21)	Mathematics: Ways of making six, practical followed by numerical recording	Differentiated tasks in groups of 6, some may work on identical tasks	To monitor the class visually whilst working specifically with a pair. Planned to listen to individuals reading from their readers.	Individual in workbooks
Daniel (22)	Mathematics: Grab of luck tallying game	Whole class introduction, verbally differentiated. Class dispersed to pairs	To reinforce differentiated instructions with those in mind. To sit at a table with two pairs and visually sweep to monitor	Whole group evaluation through verbal report
Gary (23)	Mathematics: Make a pattern with different sized circles and number them sequentially	5 small groups of 6 each with separate tasks, rotating throughout the week	(Student teacher) Itinerant	Individual drawing plus sequenced numbering
Gary (24)	Science/mathematics: Cook some cheese on toast, observing the changes, and cut it in halves then quarters before eating.	Initially whole groups, working on cooking task in 4 at individual rates	(Parent helper working on my instructions) To introduce the task to the whole group, routinely dispatch small groups to the task. Monitor work on the cloze procedure.	Individual product within small group. Record on cloze procedure worksheet, individual outcome. Discussed individually on completion.

**An overview of the assigned tasks observed.**

FOCUS CHILD	TASK	CLASSROOM ORGANISATION	TEACHER'S ROLE	OUTCOME
Gary (25)	Mathematics: sort by identified criteria	Whole group using the same worksheets	Whole group exposition, demonstration using children, Directing learning support assistant. Itinerant, supporting and assessing progress. Participant observer.	Individual outcomes (differentiated by outcome) Recorded through cut and pasted worksheets, supported by verbal interpretation.
Andrew (26)	Science: Identify the five senses and draw a scene from everyday experience to include the use of our senses	Whole group introduction, revised following a break. Individuals working in groups of 6.	Whole group interactive introduction. Seated with least able group to support whilst visually monitoring. Participant observer.	Individual worksheet to be completed in discussion in small groups
Andrew (27)	Mathematics: number stories (pictorial) differentiated by task	Whole group exposition followed by small groups working on individual worksheets, with opportunity for collaboration	Exposition in whole group, demonstration followed by approach to individuals whose work was differentiated. Participant observer.	Individual worksheets with recorded outcomes. Alternative outcomes shared by group members
Andrew (28)	Whole school assemblies	Whole group attends together with 5 year groups	Participant observer.	Listen, respond as appropriate

**Questions for semi-structured parent interview at the outset of the research.**

(The children in this study were all boys and are therefore referred to as 'he'.)

1. What does he tell you about school?
2. Who does he talk about as friends in school?
3. Does he have any particular fears or anxieties at home?
4. Do you know of any particular fears or anxieties about school?
5. How does he behave when you are amongst strangers?
6. At home does he usually follow instructions readily?
7. At home does he readily respond to the promise of reward?
8. At home in conflict, does he tend to back down, does he try to negotiate or stand his ground?
9. At home, when he experiences difficulty, does he tend to persevere, seek help or give up?



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